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**REPORT ON RUSSIA**

*By the same Author*

THE BUDDHA. A BIOGRAPHY  
INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

# REPORT ON RUSSIA

*by*  
IQBAL SINGH

KUTUB  
BOMBAY

***To Anna and the Pioneers of Yasnaya Polyana  
For their Gift to Indian Children***

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## CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	7
<b>Part I. TRAVELOGUE</b>	
1. Life on a Soviet Ship .. ..	11
2. The Night Train to Riga .. ..	17
3. The Journey to Moscow .. ..	25
4. Moscow: Impressions and Observations .. ..	31
5. Moscow Without Boredom .. ..	53
6. Glimpses of Lenin in Moscow .. ..	62
7. Life on a Kolkhoz .. ..	68
8. In Search of Tolstoy .. ..	76
9. The Journey to Tbilisi .. ..	89
10. Tbilisi not Tiflis .. ..	95
<b>Part II. INTERPRETATION AND INFORMATION</b>	
11. The Soviet Press .. ..	105
12. Soviet Education .. ..	112
13. The House with the Open Door .. ..	119
14. The Individual and Leadership in the U.S.S.R. .. ..	136
15. Soviet Democracy .. ..	147
16. Proof of the Pudding .. ..	154
17. The Soviet Union and the West .. ..	159
18. Some Conclusions .. ..	166
19. Farewell to Moscow .. ..	172
<i>Postscript: In Reply to a Letter</i> ..	180



## PREFACE

Why yet one more book on the U.S.S.R.? The question is natural and pertinent. By way of answer and justification I can only say that, so far, most of the literature on the subject, sympathetic as well as hostile, has come from Western sources. Not many Asian observers have recorded their impressions of the Soviet Union. True, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, after his brief visit to Moscow at the time of the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Soviets, wrote a number of articles which were later published in book form; and this has recently been reprinted. There are also Tagore's *Letters from Russia*, though these have never been published in English translation. However, both Nehru and Tagore visited the Soviet Union a very long time ago; at least it seems a very long time ago considering the swift tempo of Soviet development. Momentous developments have taken place in the U.S.S.R. since then — and particularly since the end of World War II.

The need for an Asian view of what these developments signify is obvious. For though the political, social and cultural achievements of the Soviet Union have a crucial bearing on the contemporary human situation as a whole, for the peoples of Asia, still suffering under an intolerable burden of misery and servitude, they signal an urgent intimation of hope and promise of deliverance. It is precisely because the professional anti-Soviet propagandists, both in the West and in Asia, realise this that they are increasingly exercising their by no means inconsiderable talent for exquisite demagogic to confuse Asian opinion by creating an anti-Soviet psychosis among the Asian peoples. The present book is an attempt to clarify some of the issues by setting down dispassionately and objectively what I witnessed during my Soviet visit and by discussing some of the significant aspects of Soviet life and polity.

If one wished to resort to a popular trans-Atlantic journalistic confidence-trick, one would, of course, start by recording the mileage one travelled in the Soviet Union, enlarging upon real or imaginary adventures one had, and invoking the names of important personalities one met and interviewed. But not being endowed with the New World genius for self-importance and self-deception, I think it more prudent to acknowledge my limitations as an observer. For though the distances I covered in the Soviet Union would look impressive on a West European scale, I am conscious that I only saw the fringe of a country which, much more than even China or India, is a land of tempting distances. My journey, in fact, was linear, not a journey in depth. It was, moreover, an uneventful journey. I neither sought nor obtained intimate glimpses of the Soviet leaders, though I must add that most of the Soviet citizens with whom I came into contact impressed me as being very important people, not because of any aura of official eminence which surrounded them, but by virtue of the fact that they represented a new human attitude and outlook, a sense of values finer and a moral awareness more profound than any I have observed elsewhere.

Alexander Werth in his *Year of Stalingrad* has some unflattering comments about the "Russia in six weeks" type of book. The present book can claim to be little more than that: it has certainly no title to expert comprehensiveness. But it has been said that it is not merely a question of swimming the Hellespont; and one can legitimately argue that it is not merely a question of six weeks — or for that matter six years — in Russia. What is essential for an appreciation and understanding of Soviet realities is not time alone, but a certain degree of receptivity of mind, and more important still, humility of approach. These are qualities in which most of the Western writers who pass for fashionable experts on the Soviet Union in official circles have shown themselves to be singularly deficient. I feel, therefore, under no obligation to offer apologies to them.

I do feel, however, that I owe an apology to my

Soviet friends who extended their help and hospitality to me so unstintingly. They will have much to forgive in this book. They will find many statements which they will regard as superficial and facetious; many errors of detail; many nice Russian names atrociously spelt. But from my limited experience of them I know them to be a generous and warm-hearted people and I have no doubt that they will be forbearing, since I venture to think that in interpreting the larger aims and ideals of the Soviet Union I have not resorted to any wilful distortion or falsehood.

IQBAL SINGH

*London,  
August 1950.*



*Part 1*

**TRAVELOGUE**

## LIFE ON A SOVIET SHIP

After all that one hears and reads about the impenetrable 'Iron Curtain' in the Western Press, it comes as something of a shock that one can enter what is in fact Soviet territory by resorting to a very simple stratagem and without even waiting for a visa from Moscow.

All that one need do is to go to the nearest Travel Agency and book a passage to Stockholm on one of the two Russian boats which run a regular service between London and Leningrad — or London and Libau when Leningrad is ice bound. They are excellent boats and, incidentally, it is the cheapest service operating between London and Stockholm. It has, moreover, the great advantage of bringing one into direct contact with the Soviet way of life.

For a ship is a national microcosm: it faithfully reflects the ethos of the nation whose flag it flies — reflects its traditions, its mental complexes and attitudes, its history and social structure, even its idiosyncrasies and snobberies. For example, a P & O liner is a floating piece of the British Empire; a Messagerie Maritime boat is redolent of French culture no less than French colonialism; an Italian ship is as Italian as the gondolas on the canals in Venice.

The analogy applies to Soviet ships. They provide one with more than a glimpse of the Soviet world. And this world, demonstrably, has some very striking features. The first thing that one notices is the absence of what might be described as 'class' distinctions. It is true that 'classes' exist. As a concession to the passengers

travelling on Diplomatic passports, or anxious to spend more money, First Class accommodation is provided. But the difference between the 'First' and the 'Third' is only in the matter of cabin accommodation and dining arrangements. The food is the same and all passengers enjoy equal right of access to all the saloons, decks, and other amenities.

The 'classes', in brief, are not exclusive and they are not antagonistic. Something like this practice also obtained on British ships during the war and for some time after the war, but with the return of peace time normalcy that democratic practice has been dropped and there has been a reversion to the *status quo ante bellum*.

Another thing I observe is the absence of fuss and formality in the running of the ship. There is nothing of that maritime esotericism which often appears, at least to a non-seafaring person like myself, as unnecessary exhibitionism. I have not seen any ostentatious saluting and parading among the crew. There is discipline, but it does not obtrude. The officers and men are extremely polite to each other and the boat is run with more than an average measure of efficiency.

It is true, of course, that there are very few passengers on this voyage — seven in all — which makes the task of the ship's staff comparatively easy. But I learn from one of my fellow-passengers who has travelled on this boat in summer when it is full to capacity that the atmosphere is as easy and informal.

Of the passengers travelling with me two belong to the British Embassy in Moscow, one a male and the other a female. Both are travelling First Class, and such proximity on a cold sea journey cannot but be conducive to profounder intimacies. In the Third Class, besides myself, there are four other passengers. All of them are Finns — a young couple in the throes of early conjugal ecstasy, a middle-aged woman, and a young nurse who has been working in a hospital near London.

The Finns, like the Swiss, are a very proper nation; they have many solid bourgeois virtues and not a little

of the bourgeois obtuseness. For a people who are supposed to buy more books per head each year than any other Western nation, I find my Finnish fellow-passengers singularly ill-informed on world affairs. For instance, none of them has heard of the Chinese Revolution, though I discover that the 17 years old Russian youth who serves as the cook's assistant has a very clear idea of what has happened in China. (It was not without some purpose that Lenin insisted that every cook must learn to govern the State.) The Finns suffer, too, from an excessive cleanliness complex which the Freudians might be tempted to attribute to some deep-rooted sense of guilt. Cleanliness is for them, indeed, a little higher than godliness and the main topic at meal times is generally the cleanliness of Finland as contrasted with the unhygienic conditions prevailing in England. "England is very dirty", remarks the youthful husband with a shudder, "we will never go back there." It all sounds reminiscent, bringing to one's mind some of the pregnant remarks on India of the homeward bound Anglo-Indian.

At Stockholm the Finns depart and I am left in solitary glory in the Third Class. We are supposed to take on more passengers, all Russians, but they will be travelling First. The departure of the Finns brings about a very marked change of atmosphere in the dining room. The Russians are, like most human beings, susceptible to other people's response to them. They respond to friendliness; they react equally strongly to hostility. I have had occasion to notice this before. When they feel they are among friends they are very open and uninhibited; on the other hand they tend to become enigmatic and unresponsive where they sense an unfriendly atmosphere.

Since the departure of the Finns, for example, I note that the attitude of the stewardess who serves my meals has completely changed. Previously she had been rather aloof, though polite and correct. But now she has become friendly and communicative — proof that,

for all the follies of our Foreign Office, we are still regarded by Soviet citizens as friends, or potential friends.

The stewardess is called Yeleana. She is a healthy, buxom girl, in her early twenties, not pretty in a conventional sense, but with that Slav softness which, if it is not beauty, is something very akin to it. She comes from Leningrad and is probably a member of the Communist Party. She knows no English and I am still struggling with the Russian alphabet, but we carry on long conversations which are mostly unintelligible to both of us and which yet serve somehow as a means of communication.

Soon, however, the situation improves. We are joined by three other Russians. There is the cook's assistant, the stewardess who does the cabins, and a mechanic from the engine-room. The mechanic speaks English and acts as interpreter. The talk ranges over a wide field, from mere exchange of compliments to Indian politics, from the Truman doctrine to Russian films and literature. The Cabin stewardess, who has a charming face (she is appropriately called Seraphima) and might have come straight from the pages of Gorky's *Mother*, asks me whether in India we read Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Turgenev; and she is delighted when I tell her that many of these Russian writers have been translated into the various Indian languages.

We stopped in Stockholm for two days. One evening, on returning to the ship after having been ashore, I found that Yeleana was still clearing away the ash-trays from the tables and the dining-room was full of stale smoke. I asked whether they had been holding a meeting. "No," the mechanic told me, "everybody has been attending a study circle." Twice weekly, I learned, there is a two hours' class in political history and it is held in the Third Class dining room. The attendance is not compulsory, but everybody in fact does attend.

Yes, the text-book is the *History of the Bolshevik Party*. Indoctrination? Undoubtedly. And why not? But ideological considerations apart, a number of interesting points suggested themselves to me. Firstly, the study of a serious political book like the one mentioned must demand a very considerable intellectual effort. Secondly, whether one agrees with all the interpretations of events given in the book or disagrees with them, it can at least be claimed that anybody who has read it carefully would not be easily deceived by the imbecilities of the Western Press, would have a reasonably accurate idea of the aims of Socialism, and would be able to understand the basic urgencies which are shaping the destiny of the modern world.

I for one would have greater regard for the political literacy of the British if the crews of the British ships also attended study circles on the history of the Labour Party, or even the history of the Tory Party. Actually, one of the British diplomats in the First Class has been engrossed throughout the voyage in the study of Daphne du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn*.

Normally, it takes only eighteen hours from Stockholm to Libau, but we were held up by thick fog just a few kilometres outside Libau harbour. To while away the time I joined in a game of dominoes with three Russians who had come aboard at Stockholm. They belonged to the Consular staff in Sweden and were going home on leave. Two of them spoke no English, but the third spoke it well. For a people who are supposed never to open their mouths without previous sanction from the Politbureau, I found these Russians extremely vocal, even voluble, anxious to exchange views on all sorts of topics under the sun — from the comparative virtues of French and Russian wines to modern art, from the Soviet ballet and opera to how they play dominoes in English pubs.

Politics, naturally, is the focal point of any intelligent conversation today, and our talk inevitably turned to politics. What, they asked me, is the political status

of India? Is it a bourgeois republic? It is a Dominion?" What are our relations with the British Crown? I tried to explain that India is supposed to be a republic while at the same time remaining a component unit of the British Commonwealth and Empire which acknowledges the British King as the head of the 'Association'. Ah, then, argued my Russian friends, you are a monarchical republic. Not possessing the subtlety of our South Indian jurists and constitutional lawyers who have drafted our ambiguous Constitution, I extricated myself by saying that the situation is rather confused and the Russians heartily agreed about the confusion.

We talked of modern art. What did I think, the Russians asked me, of modern Western art? Their own views on the subject were very definite, downright and sweeping. They had evidently visited an exhibition of modern art in Sweden just before leaving the Swedish capital. They maintained that the exhibits there were so much nonsense, devoid of positive content, lacking in the essential quality of intelligibility. I demurred to this generalisation and argued that though much of modern art is in fact sophisticated nonsense, not all of it can be dismissed as meaningless — that some of it might well possess a meaning which would be worth while investigating. Can you, they demand, explain that meaning to us? I said that not being an art critic I was not qualified to do that and, in any case, our voyage was not long enough to go into this complex and controversial subject.

For outside the fog was lifting and the coastline already visible — a faint snowy curve on the edge of a darkening horizon. Slowly, the S. S. Beloostrov was steaming towards the narrow mouth of the harbour escorted by a flight of sea gulls, those most paradoxical of birds, scavengers of the seas who yet possess the purity and innocence of doves, who bring the promise of landfall to ships and yet carry in their desolate cry all the sad burden of the desert of the sea.

## THE NIGHT TRAIN TO RIGA

HAD we arrived at the scheduled time we would have been able to leave for Moscow the same day. But we arrived too late, and the Intourist guide who met us informed us that we would have to take the midnight train to Riga and from there take the train to Moscow next evening. He had really come to meet the British diplomats, but he took me also under his protection. Later I was to discover that this was all due to a delightful error on his part: he was under the impression that I, too, was a diplomat of sorts. But let me not anticipate.

From the boat we walked in pitch darkness over the snow covered quay to the Customs House while a lorry brought our luggage. The Customs examination was the strangest I have had in my life. It was by candle-light. For by one of those coincidental mis-adventures which would have made a trans-Atlantic journalist breathlessly cable his paper the imminent downfall of the Soviets, the lights in that part of the town had fused. We had to have our baggage examined by half-a-dozen candles hurriedly produced by the Customs Officials and a tiny oil lamp which illuminated no more than a few square feet around it.

The examination was thorough, but courteous and impartial. The Russian passengers were treated exactly as were the foreigners. And the whole transaction, like most transactions in the Soviet Union, was carried out under the stern, but not unfriendly, eyes of Lenin and Stalin, Molotov and Mikoyan who, from the posters on the walls of the Customs House, exhorted everyone to greater exertions in the cause of Socialism.

Our Intourist guide took us in a car from the Customs House to the Railway Station. How the driver managed to drive us safely to our destination will remain a mystery to me. The wind-screen was so thickly frosted over that I, sitting next to the driver in the front, could see only the dim halo of street lamps rushing towards us at incredible speed and fully expected the car to crash into one of them any moment. But my apprehensions proved to be groundless. Soon we were sipping warm tea, served in Russian fashion in a glass, in the waiting room at the Station.

It was a lofty and rather depressing room with two paintings on the wall: one, a conventional landscape and another — which I tried hard to avoid looking at in view of my very recent experience of sea sickness on the voyage — represented enormous and billiously green waves breaking against some fantastic shore. The two British diplomats commented that it reminded them of the waiting room at King's Cross station.

Only at Libau there was an orchestra, two men and a woman, playing popular Russian and Western tunes. My British fellow-travellers recognised two of them: *Star Dust* and *Come Back to Sorrento*. Even with the nostalgic vision of the Bay of Naples glittering under the sun, which the vision conjured up, and the temperature outside being twenty degrees below zero (Centigrade), I had no desire just then to be anywhere but at Libau.

The human eye is a most selective organ. It only sees what and as much as it wishes to see. This is so, perhaps, because the eye is only the instrument and not the arbiter of vision. The mind, which controls and has the choice, picks out its own points of emphasis and recognition. This was once again brought home to me at Libau.

The English woman diplomat (she was actually Scotch, Oxford, upper middle class, with all the niceness and prejudices which go with the members of the British ruling class) remarked that she had a desire to "laugh and laugh." The male British diplomat had also

a similar impulse to indulge in hilarious laughter. I said that there was no reason why they should not gratify their desire; the Soviet Constitution fully guaranteed the right to laughter as could be seen from the fact that many other people in the room were laughing, too. But that, obviously, was not the point of their observation. What they meant to stress was that the crowd in the waiting room was not elegantly dressed; the women did not wear fashionable clothes and their hair styles were not up-to-date; and that the woman cashier was doing her accounts with the aid of an abacus and not an automatic cash register.

On the other hand, I had noted quite a different set of facts: first that the people around me were no different to the kind one might see in a Whitechapel or Poplar Public House, even if everybody here addressed each other as "Tovarich" and not "mate". Secondly, I could see that the woman on the table next to us was reading a novel by Gorky and that a man in overalls and with un unshaven face was poring over *Literaturnya Gazeta* (The Literary Gazette). In Whitechapel pubs, I was quite sure, they would not be reading Thomas Hardy or the *Times Literary Supplement*. But we could not argue out the point as it was already time to go and take our seats in the night train to Riga.

I had wanted to travel 'hard', both for reasons of economy and in order to avoid being too closely allied with the British Empire which, for understandable reasons, is not very popular in the Soviet Union. But the Intourist guide, still treating me with the consideration due to a minor diplomat, and much to my annoyance, had booked a soft berth in the same compartment which the British diplomats were to occupy. I protested, but it was too late to make alternative arrangements.

The journey from Libau to Riga was not exactly a picnic. The compartment was piled high with the baggage of the two diplomats who, it would appear, never travel light; and it was bitterly cold. Even the blankets which the Soviet Railways

provided, and the two overcoats which I carried on my back could not keep me warm. And then, after what seemed interminable hours of sleeplessness, as I began to feel comfortably warm, we were already nearing Riga and the male diplomat, much refreshed after a somewhat noisy sleep, was putting on a hearty act with schoolboy jokes about "Omsk, Tomsk and all change for Vladivostok."

Riga, in my mind, has long been associated with two things. First, it immediately recalls the famous old lady who rode a tiger, could never get off her ferocious mount, and came to an unhappy end. Secondly, it always reminds me of the Special Correspondent of the *Times* who, for several years after the October Revolution, sat in Riga, patiently waiting for the counter-revolution that never came, and, with telescopic vision, reported on the developments in the Soviet Union with that 'objectivity' which is so characteristic of Printing House Square. From now on, however, I shall remember Riga for many other things, not the least of which is that it provided me with my first, possibly also the last, verification of Dunne's theory of serial time. For it was here that a premonitory dream of mine turned out to be true in almost every detail. Some weeks before my visa came through, and before I had any definite plans to visit the U.S.S.R., I had dreamt that for some unknown reason I was in Riga; that I was anxious to get somewhere but had no money and could not buy the ticket to my destination.

And something very much like this came to pass. After a much needed rest, when I approached the In-tourist comrade about changing my English money, I was told that it was Sunday and even the bolshevik banks observe the Sabbath. I pointed out that at Libau he had informed me differently. But he was very sorry indeed,

he had made a mistake and not realised it was going to be Sunday. He could do nothing till the next day. So I was unable to catch the train to Moscow.

There is a line of the French poet Paul Laforgue which says: *Comme ils sont beaux les trains manquées.* The beauty of the trains one misses (real as well as metaphorical) is not unknown to me, but I have always felt that there are also some compensations in being left behind. At least there were for me in Riga. For missing that train not only enabled me to part company with the British Empire, but also to explore the capital of the Latvian Soviet Republic at my leisure.

It has a quiet beauty, with wide boulevards and elegant squares and parks. It possesses some of the Latin architectural graces, though the climatic conditions when I saw it were arctic, the river and the sea all frozen, and snow in the streets and parks. The city did not appear to have been much damaged during the war, an exception which proves the rule for Western Russia. The Germans and the Riga bourgeoisie, who left with their protectors, apparently had to make a hasty departure. They did not have time to blow up the place and it is also possible that they hoped to return soon — a hope evidently founded on wishful calculations.

To one coming to a Soviet city from the West, the most striking thing is the absence of advertisements in the streets. At Riga one saw no young ladies in their decolletés (or even without such discreet garments) proclaiming the virtues of bile beans, tooth pastes or cigarettes; no loud exhortations in heavy print to use certain hair tonics, and sedatives for tired nerves; no gratuitous admonitions as to what to eat and what not to eat. The only posters I saw on one or two hoardings were those announcing a film, a German one, called 'The Moonlight Sonata', though I learnt that it had nothing to do with the romantic episode in Beethoven's life. The absence of advertisements, I must record, is very restful and in itself a cure for the mind.

Even twenty-four hours in a Soviet city are enough

to convince one of the stupidity of much of the professional anti-Soviet propaganda. I walked through the streets of Riga alone and looked an obvious foreigner. But nobody bothered even to stare at me, much less shadow me. The only people who showed any interest in me were two little girls; and they were really not interested in me, but in my outlandish duffle coat.

The B.B.C. and the crazy Voice of America, when they intone stories of Russians living on starvation diet really do not know how ridiculous they are making themselves. One thing that is not short in Russia is food. At Riga I went into the Gastronom shops, the Soviet equivalent of grocery and delicatessen stores. The variety of food obtainable here would be the envy of working class housewives in London and Paris and Rome. The stores were open on Sunday and crowded with customers, most of them women, who could not all have been Party members or wives of bureaucrats.

Equally crowded were the bookshops and bookstalls. They were of even greater interest for me. For they did not purvey any infantile *erotica*, or Western or Breezy Stories with lurid covers such as those which litter Connaught Circus. Instead, there were works of Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and the modern Russian writers. There were also Western classics in translation: Victor Hugo, Dickens, O' Henry. The Soviets have not only succeeded in liquidating illiteracy, they have achieved something more positive. They have engendered among their people a serious interest in life and literature. This is something the West, which assumes such airs of superiority on its 'moral values' and 'culture', might well emulate with advantage.

In my admiration for the cultural achievements of the Soviet Union I was almost forgetting my ill-omened but prophetic dream. Next morning I duly presented myself at the State Bank of Riga with my Intourist interpreter. The bank manager opened a very impressive looking safe, but alas, not to hand over rouble notes in

exchange for my travellers-cheques. Instead, he brought out a file which did not look at all impressive. He looked through it carefully, then showed it to my interpreter, and eventually to me. My bank, not being one of the 'Big Five' of British Finance, was not on his list of Correspondents. He was very sorry he could do nothing for me. In Moscow, yes, but not in Riga. But there came the rub. How was I to get to Moscow?

Back at the Hotel, the manager of the Intourist Hotel was called in. There was much talk, even more gesticulation. I suggested that I could only pay what I owed when I reached Moscow, not before. The Manager would not hear of it. The dilemma of the irresistible force meeting an immovable object is nothing to the dilemma of an impecunious tourist confronted with an adamant hotel manager. Perhaps, suggested the manager, I could ring up the Indian Embassy in Moscow. I lamented that Indian journalists are not so fortunate as their Soviet colleagues: Indian embassies abroad would deny them thrice, unless they happened to be related to cabinet ministers or sons of famous fathers. The Moscow Indian Embassy would not know me from the Man in the Moon.

The impasse seemed final. But the Soviet people are a fundamentally rational people and amenable to reason. When I explained that with each day that I remained in Riga my obligations to the hotel would increase rather than decrease, and that my only hope of meeting my obligations was by getting to Moscow, he seemed to be impressed by the cogency of my argument. He said he would think over the matter. In a few minutes he came up again to my room and the deadlock was over. He informed me that the Intourist Agency would book my ticket to Moscow and even provide me with adequate funds for expenses on the way. All that I had to do was to sign a document in triplicate acknowledging my debt to them. Signing documents is no great effort for me and I agreed.

Later, my interpreter accompanied me to the station,

helped me with my bags, and, as he was saying good-bye to me, added that he would be "very glad to see me in Riga again." I marvelled and pointed out that I had caused him no end of trouble and that I still owed my bill. "That is no matter", he replied cheerfully, "and when you come next you must have dinner with me, meet my wife and see my dog." On that note of goodwill we parted.

## 3

## THE JOURNEY TO MOSCOW

THE longest way round is, perhaps, the shortest way to the heart of a country. This needs being said at a time when a whole generation of air-borne, almost air-born scribes have grown up who have certainly seen the world, but seen it largely in the image of a relief map; who fly from capital to capital, but without ever touching the solid earth between their various points of departure and points of arrival; who yet claim for their aerial reconnaissances the authenticity of a complex three dimensional picture of the condition of humanity.

It may be that all this is making virtue of necessity. After all, it is true, compulsion of circumstances rather than choice has made me go in for slower, less direct modes of transport. I doubt, however, that even if I had had the choice, I would have chosen otherwise. There is much to be said for being earth-bound even in a winged age. Over long years of more or less inconsequential peregrinations, I have come to cherish the conviction that one can learn far more about a country and its people in a third class railway carriage than during intimate *tête-a-têtes* with influential politicians, ministers and heads of states. For it is in the third class carriage that one encounters the common people whose lives and deaths, whose labours and sufferings make, as that most wise Russian, Tolstoy, suggested, the true stuff of history.

I made my journey to Moscow in a 'Hard Class' carriage. Imaginatively, like the characters in Chekov's

*Three Sisters*, one had made this journey times without number before. But the real journey surpassed in delight all one's imaginative journeys.

First, however, some details for the benefit of future travellers. The term 'hard' conjures up for most Asians, at any rate, a disheartening vision of discomfort, even indignities. Hard has not quite the same practical connotation in Russia: it is not really so hard as it sounds and one need fear no indignities. True, the seats are hard, wooden seats, but on long distance routes each person is provided with a mattress, a blanket, a pair of sheets and a pillow complete with pillow-slip. There are only four berths in each compartment and every passenger has a berth to himself or herself. The compartments are well lit, decorated in rather sombre shades of green and brown, provided with ash-trays at each corner, and even such refinements of travel as a folding table and a reading lamp. The window is double to keep out the cold, and furnished with curtains. The corridor runs the whole length of the carriage and is brightly lit; it is somewhat wider than on the trains in the West and is fitted with folding seats and tables at regular intervals. Inevitably, it serves as a kind of common room and children's nursery during the journey.

I had only two fellow-passengers in my compartment. One was an old lady, with a face that might have interested Rembrandt. She was reading Mark Twain in Russian translation, though my knowledge of the Russian alphabet was too rudimentary for me to make out the title of the book. The other passenger was a youth of about twenty who looked no different to any working class youth in Camden Town or Stepney. He was reading a history of the Russian Revolutionary Movement by Beria, and I noticed that the book was borrowed from the State Library of Riga, which provided an excellent commentary on an article (a two-column leading article published on the front page) in *Pravda* the day I arrived in Riga entitled "State Libraries as vehicles of Soviet Culture".

That youth interested me for various reasons. He was obviously representative of the new generation of Russia which has grown up not only since the Revolution, but during the period of the various five year plans and war. He had a pleasant and confident manner, his speech was at once soft and rhetorical. Later I came to know that he was working in a bakery in Riga and was going up to Moscow for some technical examination. I have no doubt that he will go far, that before long he will be a prominent member of the local Soviet and his trade union, and that he may even turn up one day at Lake Success as the understudy of some future Vishinsky.

For whatever else may or may not be true of the Soviet system, even forty-eight hours in the Soviet Union bring one ample evidence that there are no social hurdles here to the material advancement of the common people.

The train left Riga at six. Moscow time is three hours ahead of Greenwich. But night descends with remarkable suddenness in these Northern latitudes, and outside it was already twilight. Soon one could see nothing through the frosted windows except the impression of a cold lunar landscape, of a dim, luminous pencil moving slowly across a desert of snow.

Inside the carriage, however, there was the glad sound of human laughter and talk and singing. A Russian carriage is a self-complete unit not only in a technical but in a human sense; and our carriage seemed automatically to organise itself into a kind of mobile commune. The two girl conductresses who looked after our comfort — and they might well have been members of some shock brigade of the railway staff — warmed up the samovar and distributed glasses of tea to everyone. The tea was without sugar (alas!), but this deficiency was made up by the old lady in my compartment. She produced from her basket some sweets to eat with our tea — a remarkable gesture of generosity considering that sweets are relatively one of the most expensive items

on the market. So we sipped our tea and ate the sweets. Later the two young conductresses came and made our beds, and we slept the sleep of the just.

The next morning we woke to a day bright as a flawless crystal, cold like some mountain stream issuing from the heart of a glacier: the coldest day, I was told later, since the bitter winter of 1941, when the Nazis were knocking at the gates of Moscow. Our helpful conductresses had already lit the samovar and were handing round tea, and the old lady produced some food and more of the Riga toffee from her little basket which seemed to be a magical store of the good things of life. Outside the window, the shifting scene was like an Alpine snowscape, but flattened out and stretched to infinity, broken here and there by minor undulations of space and woods of fir and birch, with each tree and branch articulated in an exquisite filigree of snow. It was exactly as one had imagined a Russian scene to arrange itself. Perhaps, not quite. There were also elements in this scene which one had not imagined, or rather, where the actuality transcended the picture of one's imagination. One had not imagined adequately the havoc which Hitler had wrought in the western regions of Russia, nor the immense resilience of the Soviet people and their monumental effort of reconstruction.

During daylight hours, our train must have passed by hundreds of farms, villages, townships large and small. Most of them were newly built collections of timbered houses of the prefabricated type, the brick and stone constructions being mainly factories and civic buildings. At about three in the afternoon we got to Rzhev where the train halted for half an hour, long enough to remind one of the fierce and desperate battles that were fought over this town. It was soon after its capture that the German Radio, with a fanfare of Wagnerian dimensions, had announced the communique from the Fuhrer's headquarters that the Red Army had ceased to exist as an organised force. Now Rzhev had risen from its ashes, still largely a town of wooden houses, but in the distance there were also blocks of workers' flats, factories

and schools. Of the old Rzhev as far as one could see — and in the crystal cold air of wintry Russia the visibility is often preternaturally good — there was only the skeleton of an Orthodox Church left standing.

As the train steamed out of Rzhev near the bridge over the frozen river, I noticed the broken chassis of a German Staff car, with its German markings and characteristic camouflage colour. I noticed, too, that it was pointing westward — obviously some Herrenvolk overtaken in their flight by the ghosts of the army they thought they had annihilated.

In the West I had heard much about the trains in Russia being dirty, even from people friendly to the Soviet. Though of sceptical disposition, such is the force of suggestion, that I had almost come to believe these stories. If they were true, they are not true now and even friends of the Soviet Union outside are getting rather out-of-date in their information about present conditions.

The average Russian today possesses a far more acute sense of civic responsibility and regard for public property and hygiene than the average Westerner. I have had some experience of travel in Western Europe and can speak of it with some authority. A third class railway carriage after twenty-four hours' journey in any of the Latin countries would be littered with the debris of enormous meals consumed on the way, chicken bones, sausage skins, orange peels, chocolate wrappings, beer bottles. Even in England the floor would be scattered with burnt-out cigarette ends and ash.

But I observed that in Russian trains everyone scrupulously uses the ash-trays. Furthermore, several times in the course of the journey, the conductresses came and cleared the ash-trays; twice during the day they swept the compartments and the corridor, wiped the windows and ledges, cleaned the lavatory. Indeed, the carriage was, if anything, cleaner when we arrived at our destination than when we left Riga.

But I had almost forgotten the most charming encounter of the journey. By accident rather than design I discovered that two young women in a compartment a

little further down the corridor spoke English and French. They mistook me for an Armenian at first, but were no less friendly when I disillusioned them and told them that I was an Indian.

They were both, each in her different way, very pretty. The one who spoke English was, in fact, extraordinarily beautiful. Tall, with dark hair and hazel eyes, skin the colour of ivory, and a chiselled face that might well have burnt the topless towers of Ilium in a more chivalrous age. Her name, appropriately enough, was Lubova (I do not vouch for the spelling) which means Love in Russian. A teacher of English at a school in Riga, she was reading Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, which actually led to our introduction; and though I have never read the book nor anything else by that popular humourist, I shall always owe him a debt of gratitude. The other girl, who spoke French, was the nostalgic type. She was reading *Les Mystères de Paris* by A. Sué, another author unfamiliar to me. She seemed to be in love with the French language and literature and was a great admirer of the poetry of Louis Aragon. When I told her that I had met Aragon before the war and also last year at the Peace Congress, she exclaimed: "How fortunate you are!"

We talked of many things; of Russian art and literature; of prices of food stuffs in England; of India and China and Asia generally; of Churchill and counter-revolution. And we would have gone on talking, but the journey was already nearing its end and the train was moving through the outskirts of Moscow. So we parted, with warm handshakes and good wishes. In the inter-war years there grew up a school of poetry on the Continent for which a French critic coined the apt phrase "*Poesie de salles d'attentes*." But somebody has yet to write the poetry of the railway carriage. For what could be more poetic than the brief encounters on railway journeys?

## *MOSCOW: IMPRESSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS*

A FORTNIGHT in Moscow is almost like a year in any other European capital. I mean qualitatively. One lives here in a perpetual fever of mental excitement. There is so much that is new and challenging. The problem for anyone aiming at objectivity is how to tone down rather than tone up one's impressions. Minor irritations, such as the intractable question of exchange ratio and the difficulties of language, alternate with major exhilarations. The irritations are for the most part transient, but the sense of exhilaration remains.

By a coincidence I arrived in Moscow on a night when it was looking most Muscovite, with the temperature 37 degrees below zero (Centigrade), and all that I could distinguish of the city through the frosted window of the Intourist taxi which rushed me from the Byelorusskia Station to the Hotel Metropol was the wide streets, with lighting quieter, more elegant than in London, and the mixture of sand and snow on the pavements which gave one the fantastic feeling of being in some strange eastern metropolis overtaken by the ice age after a sand-storm.

The Hotel Metropol, I since learned, is now almost the only hotel reserved for foreign visitors. Most other hotels are being used to reduce the housing shortage; and this may well be an important reason why the Russians are not very anxious to have a large tourist traffic just at present. As I checked in I noticed that a group belonging to some Far Eastern delegation was checking out. I concluded that they must be Chinese.

But my Intourist guide corrected me; they were Koreans —from the North. An unimportant incident, but it set one thinking and with each day that has passed, one's thoughts have not only acquired greater precision, but even reached a conclusion.

The conclusion, right or wrong, must be recorded. Western propaganda, from the Voice of America upwards, which tries to build up a picture of the Soviet Union as a country isolated from world developments, withdrawn from the mainstream of history, the so-called "mystery wrapped inside an enigma", really does not make any sense here.

Nobody in Moscow in 1950 is suffering from an isolation complex. On the contrary, it is not necessary to be in Moscow for long to observe that it is very much the centre of world developments. This is not only because one sees so many varied types representing all the nationalities that make up the Soviet Union, or that so many delegations from Eastern Europe come and go, talking of far more important things than Michael Angelo. Rather, it is because in Moscow today, one is certain to run across many people from Asia, from Western Europe, and even the Americas who, whatever one's views, will almost certainly play a decisive part in shaping the course of contemporary history. True, distinguished visitors from many parts of the world — politicians, bankers, industrial magnates, military chiefs — turn up also in Washington and London on all sorts of business. However, and quite apart from any ideological considerations, one has only to compare the age groups to which the two types belong, and their social affiliations, to realise that Time, even in the narrowest sense of the word, is working for the Soviets.

There is one thing rather stultifying about being in Moscow for the first time. One wants to concentrate all one's attention on the scene around one and, instead, one constantly finds oneself engaged in distracting polemics with the absent anti-Soviets. For instance, I have been wasting a good deal of my time in an imaginary argument with that erudite literary prophet of the Cold War,

Mr. George F. Kennan whom I have never met and hope never to meet. What ill-fated inspiration made him invoke the famous Buddenbrooks parallel in relation to the Soviet Union, which has cost the American taxpayer so dear? The choice of metaphor could hardly have been more unfortunate. For, every night, I see with considerable pleasure that the five Ruby Stars (presumably symbolising the unity of the five continents) still shine with undimmed glory high above the Kremlin, and contrast their brilliance with the eclipse of Mr. Kennan's personal star of destiny. One can only assume that he must have been singularly unlucky in his contacts that brought him cheering reports of a disheartened and morally exhausted people ready to welcome their trans-Atlantic deliverers.

In 1950, at any rate, the Muscovites give no indication of being either morally or physically exhausted and psychologically disheartened. If anything, they give an impression of great confidence. The crowds which, on any Sunday, walk up and down Gorky Street, or queue up to visit the Lenin Museum and Mausoleum, or arrive in their thousands at the Park of Culture to skate by day and a good part of night, do not appear to be abnormally worried. They even look unusually gay and light-hearted and behave as if everything around belongs to them, which, of course, it does.

Allowance has always to be made for personal preferences in judging situations. But in two respects the atmosphere of Moscow differs noticeably from that of any capital either in the East or the West. First, one is struck by the lack of social tensions which do not escape attention even in a sedate and placid city like London. There may or may not be a privileged minority in the Soviet Union: I am not qualified to speak about what I have not seen. But there can be no doubt as to the existence of a privileged majority.

The working class is literally everywhere: in the cafes, in the best seats in the theatre, even in the Restaurant of the Hotel Metropol. A whole generation of Russians seems to have grown up which take for grant-

ed the values of a Socialist society with the same ease and effortlessness as do Messrs. Eugene Black, Snyder, *et hoc genus omne* the values of a society based on 'free enterprise' and private property.

The second fact which seems equally impressive is the absence of any atmosphere of crisis. The quotations from the Soviet Press, often taken out of their context, which appear in the Press outside Russia, give an altogether erroneous idea of what questions are the focus of public discussion at any moment in the Soviet Union. Judging from these extracts one would think that the Russians spend all their time and energy in denouncing the Anglo-American warmongers and Tito. That is not quite an accurate description of the situation.

During the past fortnight, I have had the major items of news and comment from *Pravda* and *Izvestia* translated to me by an English friend who knows Russian. Certainly, the Anglo-American policies come in for systematic attack; though there has been hardly any significant reference to Tito, and the impression one gets is that Moscow is prepared to give him a long rope to do the needful in due course of time. However, all the international news is given on the inside page or the back page; reporting is admirably brief; and there are rarely any banner headlines. On the other hand, the front page is usually devoted to long editorials on such serious subjects as the significance of the elections to the Supreme Soviet; Lenin and his contribution to world revolutionary thought; the problems of New Democracy; and so on. Then there has been in *Pravda*, a long serial reportage by Simonov on his visit to China. The Sports news has been confined to reports of the progress of the Chess championship where the Russians have again distinguished themselves. A great part of the Press has been taken up every day by announcements of awards to individuals and organisations for their achievements in the battle of production; and the other day, the papers contained nothing beyond the report of the State Commission on the result of the last year's plan. Every industry, it would seem, has

been able to over-fulfil its plan, with the solitary exception of the fishing industry. This, however, a Russian friend humorously explains, is not the fault of the workers in the industry, but due to "deviationist tactics" adopted by the fish. I could not help confessing that, as a sentimental vegetarian, my sympathies are in this case entirely with the deviationists.

The theme of the moment, indeed of the year, is naturally Stalin, his life and work, and the significance of his personality to this age of revolutionary transformations. The whole of the Pushkin Museum as well as more than half of the Museum of Revolution is taken up for the display of presents and gifts sent to him on his 70th birthday. Some of these gifts are still arriving and have not been unpacked. The display of these gifts is likely to provide much irreverent amusement to the sophisticated Western observers in Moscow. I can well imagine some bright boys of the American Press suggesting that if Stalin so desired, for the rest of his life he could set up a most comprehensive department store, need never renew his inventories, and yet be able to provide his customers with anything from an aeroplane and locomotive to cut-throat razors and packs of patience cards.

Sense of humour, however, is a double-edged weapon. It can lead one to the heart of the truth; and it can also land one in a blind alley. To a neutral observer, the Western sense of humour seems essentially a defence against reality. For if one thinks dispassionately about the issue, it is not difficult to see that these gifts come from simple, unsophisticated people who are not afraid of their own honest emotions and who see nothing ludicrous in paying homage to a man who, in their minds, is associated with the success of the greatest revolution in human history.

It may be that the Western intelligentsia, who see nothing funny in waxing sentimental about the births, copulations and deaths of imbecile royalties and philistine politicians, would have admired Stalin more if he had been less single-minded in his loyalty to a great

cause and to his class. But that is not the view of millions of Russians — and not only Russians. One might even venture a prophecy on this subject. History may well prove that, for example, the Mongol girl who has sent a naive embroidery, or the Indian Communists whose gifts include a grain of rice inscribed with a message of solidarity, or the collective farmers from near Rostov-on-Don who have offered a glass case containing samples of various types of grain they produce, were more lucid in their judgement of Stalin's role in the struggle for, and achievement of, Socialism than all the profound irrelevancies of the wise Athenians of the West.

There is one place in Moscow, however, where one forgets all polemics and where even the most rabid anti-Communist might be tempted to embrace the comrades in sheer delight at the spectacle. And that is in the theatre. Everybody, of course, goes to the ballet and raves about it. And it is something to rave about. But much more than the ballet I have enjoyed the puppet show at the Theatre Kookol run under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. I have seen puppet performances elsewhere, but nothing within streets of this. It is called Kookol Concert and represents a brilliant take-off of the theatre, the music hall, the circus, the opera, jazz and chamber music. The variety of representation, the verity of movements and gesture, and the clau with which the whole performance was carried through is something which once seen is not easily forgotten. . And the performing dogs in the Circus Act, more real than any dogs I know, would surely engender goodwill for the Soviets even in the heart of the most virulent of anti-Soviet publicists from Lord Russell downwards. For, as Mr. Obraztov (again I apologise for the spelling), who runs the .show, observed, but for the little accident of the October Revolution, Theatre Kookol would scarcely have been possible.

Crows are certainly hardy birds; and with this hardiness they combine an apparently obstinate sense of local loyalty and parochial patriotism. At a time when practically all other birds have migrated southwards to luxuriate in more temperate latitudes, they dourly refuse to desert the Soviet capital. Every evening they fly in from the direction of the rivers, congregate noisily over the Sverdlov Place which evidently serves them as a convenient rallying point, before dispersing for the night. They are remarkably regular in their habits. Within a minute or two of their arrival, all the street lights of Moscow are turned on as though by secret arrangement. Most of them, of course, settle down for the night round the vent of the tall Moscova Hotel, presumably because it offers a warm shelter. Others find convenient perches among the intricate roofs of the Lenin and Historical Museums, both buildings in a depressing Victorian style. None of them, I have noticed, go near the beautiful cathedral of St. Basil at the far end of the Red Square. Anti-theological bias? Freedom of belief and unbelief? I wondered for several days. Then I discovered the real reason. It is entirely thermal and has nothing whatever to do with the metaphysical issues or the Party Line. That ancient Church is not fitted with a central heating system.

Some of these crows surprise one by their audacity which borders on impudence. They wheel over the Red Square, dip down a little as though to mock the sentries guarding the entrances to the Kremlin, then rise high again to clear the ancient brick walls, and disappear into the complex of buildings which constitute the seat of Soviet power, leaving a mere foreign journalist feeling green with envy.

It is not only the birds that are *rara avis* in wintry Moscow. The same applies to man's four-footed friends. Dogs, for instance. It is rarely that one comes across a dog in the streets of Moscow. When one does, it is usually an unhappy, shivering creature on a lead, in nine cases out of ten, a member of the diplomatic colony. There are more dogs to be seen in the suburbs and in the

country around Moscow, but they all seem to be in a hurry to get indoors. The Russians are fond of cats: even Lenin had one and allowed himself to be photographed with it in his lap. But cats are canny creatures. Nothing would induce them to venture out or get their paws wet on the frozen pavements. I have watched one, a tortoise-shell beauty, which is attached to our Hotel. All through the day it sleeps in a snug curve of the stairs, but at night it wakes up and causes the dancing couples in the Restaurant no end of inconvenience by trying to weave in and out under their feet, till the maitre d'hotel comes and drives it out of the room unceremoniously.

The Hotel Metropol, incidentally, dates from before the Revolution. Its architecture, interior decoration, furnishings, and even the sanitary installations (leadless glaze from Cliffe Vale Potteries) reflect the taste and preferences of a bygone age — and class. It was obviously intended to cater for the greater ease and delectation of the mercantile bourgeoisie of Russia which had its brief hour of glory during the half-century which separated the 'emancipation' of the serfs and the October Revolution. How it loved fake grandeur and imitation ornament! One has only to look round the banqueting hall to see that. Its lofty glass roof, its mock Renaissance ornaments, the huge brass lamp-stands, all lend to the place the insidiously melancholy air of a mausoleum, especially during the day when it is all but deserted. The motifs on the frieze high up along the walls must, according to the current aesthetic standards of the Soviets, be regarded as distinctly decadent — miniature pseudo-classical landscapes, *fêtes champêtres* after the French Masters, and the repetitive theme of a highly 'cosmopolite' Leda about to surrender herself to a no less 'cosmopolite' Swan. In the centre of the dance floor is a marble pool with live fish, and a fountain throws a cold spray over the figure of a smiling Eros (at least I presume it represents Eros).

Every evening an orchestra plays the same shrill tunes. Dancing is popular and on Saturdays and Sundays there is hardly a table free after about 11 p.m. The

dancing goes on till the early hours of the morning, for the Russians seem to wake up when most people are in the habit of retiring to bed. To see these dancing couples is very instructive in a social sense. They represent a cross-section of the working population of Moscow. There never is a starched shirt to be seen among them. And yet they move about and dance with the same self-assurance that one associates with the scions of the aristocracy and the heirs of company directors who monopolise the fashionable hotels in the West. And why shouldn't they? After all, they fought their way into the Metropol just as they did into the Kremlin. Difficult though it may be to imagine at this distance, it is a fact that the Metropol, and the building now housing the Lenin Museum, were the scenes of historic battles during the Revolution. It was here, I am told, that the dying order made its last desperate stand, the famous stand of the Cadets.

Moscow has an abundance of bookshops, but few of them deal in second-hand books; and those that do are rather disappointing. The explanation is simple. Nobody here likes to part with books, not even the book reviewers, since they do not suffer from the economic pressure which urges their Western colleagues to look upon review copies as an important source of livelihood. The second-hand bookshops specialising in foreign books are particularly badly stocked. Scott, that inveterate stand-by of all second-hand book dealers, is, of course, conspicuous; so are the other Victorians — Zola, Dickens, Anatole France; also stray copies of *Country Life*, an illustrated *History of Florence*, and an apparently unknown classic, the *Life of an Elephant*. All this hardly sounds exciting. But some of the titles on the shelves have astonished me. Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief*, for example. How did it get as far as Gorky Street? And by what devious route? Or, more astonishing still, Dr. Marie Stopes' classic on conjugal bliss without tears, *Married Love!* I can only assume that it must have formed part of the library of some timorous Anglo-Saxon diplomat. For I cannot imagine that the serious-minded

Russians have any use for such entertaining trivia.

If one stays long enough in a second-hand bookshop one is bound to come across something worth while. For a couple of roubles I picked up Virgil's *Eclogues and Georgics*, translated by T. F. Royds in the *Everyman* series. A cryptic phrase, "from G.N.R., Merry Xmas. 1907", is all the clue to its previous owner. But the book itself has provided me much pleasure during my stay in Moscow.

Reading Virgil, two things strike one. First, I begin to wonder whether these Victorian translations are not, on the balance, preferable to contemporary versions. If they lack candour and accuracy, they have at least a grandeur of verse form which should not be underrated. Secondly, it is surprising how much nearer Virgil is to the spirit of post-Revolutionary Russian ideas of the function of poetry than he is to the Westerners who proclaim to the world their monopoly of classical heritage. He was what the Russians call a truly national poet, a people's poet. He did not disdain to use his poetry to advise the Roman farmers how to look after their vines, when to plant certain trees, what to do with their bees, and even wrote an excellent poetic manual on animal husbandry. I can imagine him perfectly at home in a Kolkhoz, writing about the lives, loves and labours of the collective farmers. I cannot visualise Mr. Eliot, Auden or Sartre condescending to use their poetic talent for anything quite so useful and purposive.

The foreigners in Moscow are not very popular. The Muscovites are, however, polite and helpful people. Only there are two places where their customary politeness is not so much in evidence. At the theatre, after the show is over, the audience makes a frantic rush for the cloak-rooms to collect their overcoats, fur caps and goloshes; and in this stampede the devil takes the hindmost. Similarly, in the Moscow Underground during rush hours it is quite unrealistic to observe the normal rules of courtesy. Renan has observed somewhere that it is impossible to be polite in a Paris omnibus without

violating the rules of the company. Much the same can be said of the Moscow Underground. Any quixotic attempt at being polite would almost certainly mean missing the train or the station.

The past thirty years have not been an easy period for the Soviet people to live through. Revolution, Civil War, War of Intervention, economic blockade with its harvest of misery and malnutrition — these ordeals are not eugenic processes. They have taken their toll of beauty. The average of feminine beauty in Moscow is not so high as in the West. That is, perhaps, an unfair statement to make. I have seen Moscow only in the depth of a very severe Winter. Temperatures of between 20 to 30 degrees below zero (Centigrade) are not particularly good for the complexion. Moreover, beauty lies partly in the art of dressing nature to advantage; and in this arctic climate the important thing is not to look beautiful, but to keep warm. Ilya Ehrenburg pointed out during the war that felt snow-boots were an essential piece of armament. They are no less necessary a weapon in the peace time fight against General Winter. They are excellent for warmth, but they do not show legs to the best advantage, do not reveal the ineffable excellence of a well-turned ankle. One might almost say that in Russia in winter, *il faut souffrir pour être chaud*. Bad French, but it sums up the situation; at least the women suffer aesthetically.

Having said this I am assailed by remorse. For if the average of beauty is not as high as in Western capitals, it is also true that the number of outstandingly beautiful faces one sees in Moscow is truly remarkable. In the lobbies of the theatres, in the Metro, in the streets, one comes across women so graceful and beautiful as to take one's breath away. Again and again in the Soviet capital I have been reminded of J.J. Meyer's remark on the *Mahabharata* that "to sail over this great sea..... 'threefold bronze' is needed about the breast." And not only about the breast...

The Russians have a genius for pageantry, but the art of window dressing seems to be beyond them. One is tempted to think that they do not really believe in it. To a Western eye accustomed to the glittering showmanship of Paris, Geneva, Rome, Stockholm or even London, Moscow is bound to appear, at a first glance, dull and unrewarding as a shopping centre. There is hardly any attempt at attractive window display except in some of the bookshops; and what there is cannot be described as imaginative. But it would be quite wrong to draw from this any far-reaching conclusions as to the position with regard to consumer goods available in the shops. For that, one must be enterprising enough to push through the crowds of shoppers and look at the counters inside the shops.

Here the picture is quite different. For Moscow in 1950 may not be a city of felicity, but it certainly does not suggest any scarcity. The position in regard to food might even be described as exceptionally good. Some of the larger Gastronom shops look like food museums; both in quantity and quality they could rival the best West End stores. Only the crowds one meets in these shops are quite different to those who buy their rations at Fortnum and Mason. I have counted as many as twenty different varieties of cold meat, dried and pickled fish and cheese, even in some of the suburban Gastro-noms. The wines, all of Russian vintage, are plentiful. Indeed, of the few advertisements to be seen in the streets, there is one which extols the virtues of Georgian wines. The one exception to this variety and abundance is fresh fruit. The only things one can buy are oranges, tangerines, apples and pears; and they could do with some Michurinian improvements. On the other hand, there is more than an adequate supply of dried fruit not only in the shops but on the stalls outside. There is one significant absence from the food counters — American tinned foods. A clear indication, even if one did not already know it, that Mr. Marshall's manna has not been this way. But the Russians seem to be doing quite nicely without it.

The position is equally good as regards most of the essential consumer goods. In the department stores you can get all the household necessities. And not only necessities. Even such luxury items as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, electric irons and kettles, some exquisite China and glass, are not only on show but on sale. And all the perfumes, too. It is not necessary to read the report of the Central Statistical Board of the U.S.S.R. to know that the Soviet perfume industry has "smashed" its target of production by a comfortable margin.

The textiles are various and of good quality; and there is real silk on sale. However, in the ready-made clothing departments the clothes do not compare favourably with the Western products in the matter of style and cut. Comrade tailors will have to do better; for the 'New Look' remains still very far from Moscow. The emphasis seems to be on utility rather than refinement. But the Russians say: "Does this really matter?" And they argue that there will be time enough for refinements when all the ravages of war have been made good and the basic needs of everyone have been provided for. This is a proposition with which no serious person will quarrel.

The question of price and wage structures in the Soviet Union is complex and baffling — for an outsider. There are so many intricate factors involved that any generalisation can at best be guess-work and might well be a presumption. For one thing, money has not quite the same significance in the Soviet Union; for another, anybody who takes the official exchange ratio of the rouble as the guide is likely to find himself in a hopeless muddle. He may find himself coming to the conclusion either that the Russians are very rich or that they have perfected the art of living on thin air. Both these conclusions would be manifestly absurd.

At least, before the recent revaluation of the rouble in terms of Gold, the exchange ratio bore no tangible relations to its purchasing power inside the country. It seemed that the ratio had been fixed for no other

purpose than "*épater les diplomats*" and to make them feel what it means to be poor. For though they were then getting a preferential rate of exchange some thirty per cent above the normal rate, sumptuary allowances must have melted away in the open market; and even the Americans, for once, had carefully to count, if not every kopeck, at least every rouble they spent. My own completely unauthoritative guess is that the rouble in relation to internal values is today equal to about five pence rather than roughly twenty which is its official exchange value.

Having said this, however, one is forced immediately to embark on a whole series of reservations. This ratio cannot be accepted in calculating wages. And for the good reason that the concept of a 'social wage' system is so different to what prevails outside the Soviet Union that Russian wages cannot be translated mechanically into money values on the Western pattern. The social wage system takes into consideration the free social benefits which the Socialist economy provides as also various other factors.

Rent, for example, which is a very substantial drain on workers' wage packets outside Russia, is not a material item in the expenses account of a Russian worker. A worker in London has to pay as much as 15 to 25 per cent (in some cases even as high as 30 per cent) in rent. In Moscow the rents vary from two to five per cent of people's wages and are directly related to these wages. What is more, it is evidently a fact that hundreds of thousands of workers, who hold labour awards, are entitled to free accommodation as also are those engaged on difficult jobs. Furthermore, transport in Moscow is much cheaper than in London or even Paris. For fifty kopecks you can go anywhere on the Metro and workers living far from their place of work often get free travel facilities.

Taxation is lower than in the West, varying between five to thirteen per cent. There are no deductions for health and unemployment insurance: health benefits being free of charge and unemployment for anybody willing to

work, and even the unwilling, literally impossible.

Cinemas and other cultural entertainments are also cheaper than in the West.

Finally, since most people eat at least one meal a day in the canteens, the expenditure on food is less heavy than it would be otherwise. Even so, in the case of urban workers—for food is not an important item of expense for the workers on kolkhozes and sovkhozes—food constitutes a major drain on the wage packets. Until the recent reduction in prices a worker probably spent as much as forty per cent of his wages on food. Today the figure would be about thirty per cent.

The wage scales vary greatly. The minimum wage for unskilled labour ranges between five to seven hundred roubles per month. But this figure is no precise indication of what an unskilled worker can and often does earn. There are all kinds of bonuses for exceeding the norms. What is more, the definition of unskilled labour is very restricted in the Soviet Union. Many of the categories regarded in the West as unskilled or semi skilled qualify for wage scales on the skilled level. The ultimate objective of the Soviets is to abolish the distinction between the skilled and the unskilled worker; and to achieve this all sorts of incentives are offered for people to acquire skill and technical knowledge.

The average wage for skilled work again varies, ranging between twelve hundred to two thousand **roubles** per month. But the average wage is only the minimum. As for the maximum which a skilled worker can earn, the limits are very elastic. It is not uncommon for Stakhanovite miners, for example, to earn as much as fifteen thousand roubles per month by hard work. This certainly could not happen in South Wales, the Ruhr or even the fabulous New World, no matter how hard a miner worked. Contrary to the view held outside the Soviet Union, the highest income group in Russia is not made up of bureaucrats, but of Stakhanovites, of technicians and specialists, of artists, writers and journalists.

Any generalisation on so complex a question must be made with due reserve, but one is entitled to record

an impression. And my impression is that the complacent assertions of Western experts that the wage standards in the Soviet Union are far below those in the West can no longer be accepted as having uniform validity. It would be truer to say that in the case of unskilled workers the wages are lower than those of the same category of workers in the privileged countries like Great Britain, Sweden and Switzerland, though they are now probably higher than in Western Germany and France, not to mention Italy.

The wages of skilled workers, on the other hand, have already overtaken the best that the West can offer and will surpass that best within the next year or two. This is the situation even taking purely money values as one's standard of comparison. But such restricted terms of reference, I repeat, are not really fair in making a comparison. There are other things which must be taken into account, and these definitely suggest that the balance of advantage has moved decisively in favour of the Russian worker.

For one thing, the trend of real wages is constantly upward with the periodic reduction of prices, while in the West the trend is in the opposite direction. Secondly, I think one will have to be very innocent or very perverse to deny that, while the fear of unemployment is a constant source of anxiety to workers even in that paradise of free enterprise, the United States, the Russian workers do not suffer from any sense of insecurity on this count.

The Russians, finally, can honestly derive satisfaction from the thought that, although they have had to endure intolerable hardships in the past, they have not been living on 'tick' or someone else's charity or someone else's labour. The importance of this factor in building up national morale and confidence should not be underrated.

Moscow in 1950 is not a city living on short rations. If the crowds in the shops (particularly on Sundays when there seems to be something like a Xmas rush for shopping) are an indication, then money is not in short

supply in the Soviet Union either. The infinitely subtle and the infinitely knowledgeable Western observers in Moscow, who can never persuade themselves to believe that socialist economy can ever work, of course give a very different interpretation of the situation. They warn one that the crowds one finds engaged in frantic buying in the shops are only "people passing through Moscow." They inform one that most of the Moscow population is living on a diet "of a bit of dried fish and bread." They ask one to mark and count how many of the buyers are "in uniform". And it is good to be cautioned. For it is true that Moscow, like any great city, has a large floating population with people daily coming and going and using their stay in the metropolis to replenish their stores. It is also true that quite a number of shoppers are in uniform. And why not? Workers in uniform are entitled to be considered as part of the normal population of any city. And furthermore, it is probably the case that there are some people, even in Moscow, who have to make a meal out of dried fish, sausages and bread; there are plenty of people in the West who have to be satisfied with much less.

Yet, it would appear to me that there are none so foolish as the wise who will not accept a simple explanation just because it goes contrary to their wishes and who will go to the limit of absurdity to evade reality. For the simple fact is that the Soviet economy has today more than made up the damage inflicted by the Nazis and is beginning to deliver the goods that it promised — and more.

One thing is admittedly short in Moscow; and the Muscovites do not deny this shortage. There is acute housing shortage. Living space is strictly and, on the whole, fairly rationed. There is not only a housing shortage, but the quality of living space available leaves much to be desired, especially in the case of some of the outer districts. Even in the centre of Moscow, one often feels a coat of paint would improve matters. This remark applies to the Kremlin itself, though I find the

delicate and subdued tints to which the red of the outer walls, the yellow of the buildings and the green and gold of the domes have worn, aesthetically very satisfying.

The reasons for this shortage are easy to understand. Firstly, the main Soviet effort in the sphere of housing has been concentrated in those cities and regions which suffered the greatest wreckage and whose need is much greater than that of Moscow which, curiously, does not seem to have suffered much damage (The Nazis, after a few early attempts at aerial bombardment, gave up the venture and came to entertain a very high regard for the city's anti-aircraft defences). The second reason is that the population of Moscow has grown at an enormous pace, even since the end of the war. Yngve Lundberg, a Swedish journalist who visited the Soviet Union in 1947, gives the figure of four and a half million. A conservative estimate of the population today would be nearer seven. It is obvious that even the most ambitious housing programme cannot easily cope with such an enormous increase. But the Russians, with whom I have talked, confidently assure me that the problem is going to be solved within the next two years. A bold claim no doubt, but in the past they have achieved so many things which the 'experts' considered impossible, that it would be only elementary prudence not to assume that they are bound to fail.

That applies to some other, more ideological claims which the Soviets make. As one enters the four-storeyed central department store at the corner of Sverdlov Place, which might be regarded as the equivalent of Selfridges or Gammages, one notices huge red banners with the slogan: "Under the banner of Lenin and Stalin forward to Communism." To many Westerners this must seem a matter for laughter. After all one would not expect a London department store to have as its slogan: "Under the banner of Attlee and Morrison forward to Nationalisation."

But there precisely is the difference of outlook between the East and the West. The Muscovites take the slogan very seriously. To them it means exactly what

it says and that meaning is not esoteric, but wholly explicit. And who can say if in ten years from now the laughing Westerners may not come to recognise that the joke was really against them?

All ruling classes in history have thought themselves to be indispensable, essential to the universal frame of things and in that sense eternal. Kings and emperors considered themselves to be divine or, at least, invested with some of the attributes and prerogatives of divinity. The feudal order had similar presumptions. And after it the bourgeoisie, which began by claiming its 'inalienable' rights on the basis of an appeal to rational concepts of human justice and freedom, has in the course of its term of earthly power and glory come to entertain the flattering notion that it is part of the immutable cosmic pattern of reality.

Theoretically, one knows that such notions are delusive and wishful; that ruling classes come and go at specific stages of history; and that the bourgeoisie, too, will pass away and is, in fact, already on the way out. However, it is one thing to know this in theory, quite another to have a practical verification of the theory. And for that it is necessary to come to Moscow. It is a capital where one is aware of one very significant absence. The bourgeoisie is absent from the scene. This is brought home to one in a variety of ways, but the most conclusive proof that the men of property have really disappeared from the historic scene is that one can walk the streets of Moscow in all the directions in which the wind can blow and yet look in vain for the memory of that venerable temple of bourgeois civilisation — the Stock Exchange. The Soviets have abolished the Stock Exchange and all that it stands for. Indeed, anybody who wanted to gamble with the national resources or to play at 'bulls' and 'bears' with other people's earnings, would promptly be sent to a lunatic

asylum or some other even more appropriate place.

To Muscovites there seems nothing worthy of note in this little detail. Many of them have grown up with and since the Revolution. Socialism is a part of their emotional and spiritual heritage just as much as capitalism is that of the gentry from Wall Street, Throgmorton Street, Clive Street and Dalal Street. But to an outsider coming to Moscow for the first time this strikes as being charged with immense significance.

Moscow is, of course, a capital abounding in such symbols of revolutionary change. For example, every time I cross the street from my hotel I cannot help pausing to look at a building which stands at the corner of Puskinskaya and a street the name of which oddly translates itself as Hunters' Row. Outside this building there are notices announcing musical concerts. But that is not what has intrigued me. The point of interest for me is that it has a history — and a new history. Hall of the Nobles when the Czars sat in the Kremlin, it is now the hall of the new Soviet nobility — the Trades Unions.

However, it is not only symbols of brick and mortar which communicate a sense of historic change. The city is even richer in living symbols of flesh and blood. The population of Moscow, like that of any great and growing metropolis, is an infinitely various aggregate of humanity. Among it are to be found all sorts of people: good, bad and indifferent; dark and fair; beautiful and ugly; well-dressed and ill-dressed; some with a great deal of money to spend and others who have carefully to count their kopecks. But one is conscious of one important difference. The Moscow crowd is socially more homogeneous.

Let me make my meaning more precise. Homogeneity is not the same thing as uniformity, and it is not suggested that among the citizens of Moscow one does not observe differences of tastes, interests, aptitudes and incomes. One does. But one is never conscious of distances between people, of insurmountable social barriers. East is East and West is West. Kipling was

right in one sense: in London both East and West have their separate identities. But in Moscow there is no East End and no West End—no 'we' and no 'they'. It may be merely a matter of conventional form that everybody addresses everybody else as "*tovarich*", but conventions have their roots in social realities and I have no doubt that this particular convention is significant of the fraternity on which the Soviet society is based. Nobody in Moscow keeps his 'place'; or rather, everybody does, since nobody is barred from any place, not only in terms of legal and constitutional fictions, but in actual practice. The working class is everywhere. It fills the museums and libraries, the concert halls and cinemas, the expensive no less than the cheap seats at the theatre. And it can be seen enjoying itself in the most select restaurants.

I had noticed something of this social freedom in the democracies of Eastern Europe during a visit in the summer of 1947, but nowhere else in Europe - or Asia. In London, after five years of a Labour administration, which never tires of parading the virtues of its 'democratic socialism', I have yet to see couples from Stepney and Poplar, after an honest day's work, walking into the grill-room at the Ritz or the Savoy without feeling self-conscious about it. There is no legal bar to such a thing, but it is not done. Stepney and Poplar instinctively know it, and so does Mayfair. But it is done in Moscow every night. I have seen in one of the most expensive restaurants in the Soviet capital, run naturally and rightly as a public enterprise, a worker (without collar and tie) and his wife march in, sit down at a table next to a Red Army General and order themselves a big meal complete with a bottle of Russian champagne.

Now it would be giving a false picture of the situation to make out that every worker in Moscow can order himself an expensive meal and wash it down with a bottle of champagne every night. Enthusiasts who make such exaggerated claims do no good to the cause of an understanding of the Soviet Union and her achievements. The Russians themselves are realists in everything. They

make no claim that they have yet reached that level of plenty and prosperity. To each according to the quality and quantity of his work. It is all written down in black and white in the Soviet Constitution; and it is still the guiding principle of Soviet economy. It is a fair principle and it is fairly operated.

For work in Russia does mean honest, productive work, not coupon-clipping, company promoting or 'dividend-ing' at the cost of other people's toil. The truth about any country is bound to be complex and that goes for the U.S.S.R., too. But one truth about the Soviet Union is simple and unmistakable. It is a country where the interests of the workers, by hand or brain, on the land or in the factory, are not only the paramount consideration in all planning. They are the only interests that count. There are none other.

## MOSCOW WITHOUT BOREDOM

**Y**OU will be bored. Such is the haunting refrain which Mr. T. S. Eliot puts into the mouth of one of his protagonists in *Sweeney Agonistes*. The intelligentsia in pre-revolutionary Russia suffered not a little from this terrible affliction, though with the Russians it was more of a slow, wasting disease — not quite the galloping consumption which it is with Mr. Eliot's creations. The Revolution, if it has done nothing else, has at least cured the Russian intelligentsia, and not merely the intelligentsia, of this malady. I would go even further. Mr. Eliot, if he ever happened to turn up in Moscow, would certainly have occasion to feel intransigent; the Communists would undoubtedly find him intolerable, and he in his turn would be equally intolerant towards the comrades. But I am confident that he would not be bored in Moscow. It is a place where it is impossible to be bored, unless, of course, one happens to be a Western diplomat.

Moscow impresses one in many ways, but one of the most impressive things about the Soviet capital is the cultural amenities it offers its citizens. There is only one word for it — overwhelming. Even those permanently resident in Moscow who have the necessary leisure and means must find it difficult to savour all the rich and varied cultural fare; but for anyone who is only on a brief visit the problem of choice is truly agonising.

A multitude of tempting possibilities offer themselves, and the human frame being what it is, one can only explore one thing at a time. There is so much to see and so little time to see it in. For the balletomane and lover

of theatre and opera it is unquestionably a city of felicity. There are at least thirty professional theatres with an extraordinarily comprehensive repertoire of ballets, comedies, tragedies, operas, puppet shows and plays meant for and acted by youths but from which adults can also derive entertainment and instruction. And this leaves out of reckoning the amateur theatres attached to the various industrial, educational and cultural institutions. There are musical concerts and films. There are museums enough to keep one busy for six months. And if you still feel dissatisfied, you can always go to the planetarium, hear lectures on such diverting subjects as "Did the Universe have a beginning and will it have an end?" or "Life on Mars", and watch the diurnal movement of the earth and heavens reproduced and see the sun rising over the Kremlin and the Moscow skyline to the strains of the Soviet Anthem. London, the capital of an empire over which the sun never sets, has no planetarium to this day.

The cultural entertainments offered by Moscow are not only impressive in a quantitative sense: they are qualitatively of a high order. The Muscovites are a discriminating people: they expect the highest standards of execution from their professional and amateur artists. Performances which might pass for masterpieces of perfection in the cities of the Western world would be considered no more than average in Moscow. During my stay in Moscow I indulged in a veritable orgy of theatre-going and I must record that the best that Moscow theatres can offer is really superlative.

A visitor coming to Moscow for the first time is tempted to think that there must be a special boom in the theatre business. This is an incorrect impression. To suggest that there is a boom is to imply that there is often a slump. Independent observers who have lived for several years in the Soviet capital assure me that they have never known such a thing. Like the Soviet economy, the Soviet theatre is not subject to periodic crises and does not have booms followed by slumps. Its development is even and progressive. But it is true there

is a time and season for everything; and just now the Moscow theatre is at its height. After each visit to the theatre, I have come back with the feeling of plenitude — and a feeling, too, that I will probably never see anything quite so perfect again. But the next night the same experience has been repeated somewhere else. If, therefore, one selects for comment certain items and not others, it does not imply that others are not noteworthy. It is merely because of limitations of space.

First, the ballet. For the ballet is a Russian speciality and under the Soviet dispensation it has attained an amplitude and magnificence which is beyond compare. In speaking of the ballet, one finds oneself torn between one's love of magic and one's concern for the actual condition of humanity. For those in search of magical beauty, it would be difficult to suggest anything better than a performance of *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoi Theatre. It is pure enchantment. But my own preoccupation with the realities of our time incline me, unjustly perhaps, in favour of *Krasnaya Mak*, or the *Red Poppy*. For the real world of mankind, suffering and struggling and shaping its own destiny, has a beauty more holding and urgent than any universe of magic. Indeed, the ballet, if it is to be something more than mere relaxation for tired bodies and tired minds, an avenue of escape into the realm of the wishful and fantastic, must be able to grapple with that which is actual and living. That is the basic condition of its survival.

That is precisely what lends significance to *Krasnaya Mak*, which, incidentally, Mao Tse Tung made a special point to see during his stay in Moscow. In this ballet the classic media of dance and mime are used to represent a contemporary theme; and the experiment is, in my view, wholly successful — certainly more successful than in the *Green Table*. The theme, as is probably well known, is the struggle of the Chinese workers against imperialism, and its Chinese allies and hirelings. The scene is recognisably the Shanghai Water-front. The story has been brought up-to-date: in the final scene we witness the storming by the workers of what looks like a Far

Eastern Bastille and the culmination shows the flags of New China unfurling to a crescendo of stirring revolutionary music. And the effect, I can testify as a not excessively emotional observer, is at once moving and exalting. Lypyshinskaya as Tao Hua, the Chinese dancer whose heart is with the coolies and the Revolution, nearly brought the house down with an applause which lasted more than a quarter of an hour — an incident which reminded me of the apt remark of my Swedish friend, Yngve Lundberg, that in Russia the perfect actors seem to have the ideal audience.

Just now, it may be added, the balletomanes in Moscow are divided into two camps: the partisans of Ulanova and the partisans of Lypyshinskaya. I am a non-partisan in this matter: if ever called upon to judge I should be inclined to divide the apple and give one half to each. Both, in their different ways, are magnificent.

For the lovers of drama, the choice is even more varied. They can choose anything from *Othello* and *Dead Souls* to *Deep are the Roots* and *Under the Shadow of Your Eyelashes*, the last being a puppet show which brilliantly satirises Hollywood. I would only mention two plays — Chekov's *Three Sisters* at the Arts Theatre and a dramatic version of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. The performance of *Three Sisters* at the Arts Theatre founded by Stanislavsky had a particular interest for me. It was especially for this theatre that Chekov wrote the play and the role of Irena was meant to be acted by his wife Olga Chekova. In the production now running the part is played by Gosheva. It is no exaggeration to say that it is worth making a journey to Moscow just to hear her utter the magic word. It sums up all the nostalgia and pathos, all the ineffectual yearnings and the stultifying indecisions which were the life of the provincial middle class in pre-revolutionary Russia.

That brings one to an important point. Chekov is quite differently interpreted on the Soviet stage from the way in which it is customary to represent his work on the Western stage. I have seen at least three different versions of *Three Sisters*, among them one by St. Denis

which was highly, and, in my opinion mistakenly, stylised. The tendency generally is to stress the purely comic and humorous element in Chekov's characters and situations; and humour and comedy are undoubtedly important ingredients of the Chekovian world. Chekov has himself confessed somewhere that satire was the only weapon he could wield. But the contemporary Russian interpretation of Chekov goes beyond humour and beyond comedy: it trembles on the verge of the tragic. It is the tragedy of a whole class suspended by history in an everlasting uncertainty, a class unable to make up its mind in any situation and, therefore, always allowing itself to drift inexorably towards unheroic disaster. The tragic strain in *Three Sisters* was brilliantly articulated in the Arts Theatre production, and the last act worked up, with extremely penetrating touches, to a most moving climax of inarticulate frustration.

It is easier to see the tragic in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. The tragic in it is not the undertone: it is the dominant note. The Arts Theatre version distinguished itself in that it related the tragedy of the individual to the social pattern, and thus widened and deepened its significance. An unusual feature of the production was the device of a narrator, at once a part of the play and outside it, who periodically appeared on the scene and described what was passing in the minds of the protagonists. This could have been irritating, but it was done so well that one was never aware of any intrusion. Watching the performance of *Resurrection* one began to understand what is the secret of Soviet actors' success. Where Western actors are always trying to achieve some highly complex and subtle effect, some scintillating originality of interpretation, the Russians achieve a verity because they do not seem to be acting at all, or admiring their own virtuosity, but living the parts they play. Even the minor parts are acted with an authenticity that would make many a star performance elsewhere look stilted by comparison. As for the stars, they beggar description. Pushkarva, as Katusha in *Resurrection*, invested the part with a tragic nobility and tender beauty that I do not hope to see surpassed.

I have already mentioned the Theatre Kookol which specialises in puppets. In some ways I found these performances by the animated inanimates even more satisfying than plays with live actors. This might be because the puppets bring out more sharply and convincingly the element of the absurd and the ridiculous in life which appeals to me enormously.

The play entitled *Under the Shadow of Your Eyelashes* which is providing much cause for mirth to Muscovites is a brilliant essay in this direction. It is not only Muscovites who are enjoying its mordant wit and satire. It is done with such verve that even the ranks of Tuscany, one might say, cannot forbear to cheer. Americans who have seen it agree that it would be a box-office hit even on Broadway; and they should surely know. For the theme is the Hollywood contribution to the cause of Western 'democracy'. The adventures and misadventures of the producer, who in a flash of inspiration realises that Bizet's opera, *Carmen*, can be twisted to give it an anti-Red angle and thus cash in on the anti-Soviet hysteria which is sweeping the New World, are portrayed with that delightful Russian sense of humour which might yet prove to be a more potent weapon in the cold war than the pile of atom bombs.

The Russians themselves are somewhat critical of their Opera. They say they have not got any really outstanding operatic singers, male or female. I cannot judge, but I found Pirogov as Boris Godunov very good. Furthermore, the Russian opera scores on two counts over its Western counterpart. The first is the remarkable genius which the Russian directors have for managing crowd scenes on the stage. The second is their gift for pageantry. The richness of the costumes and the *décor* is by itself so magnificent as to sustain interest. Even the most lavish productions I have seen in London or Paris seem insipid and provincial beside the spectacle provided by, say, *Sadko* or *Boris Godunov* at the Bolshoi Theatre.

And for excellent reasons. No Western producer could afford to invest so much money in costumes and

properties. The expense would be prohibitive, especially in view of the fact that all productions are speculative ventures. How, then, can the Russians do it? The answer is simple. First, the theatre in the Soviet Union, like other arts, is not dominated by the laws of the cash register. Secondly, it is not subject to the extortionist demands of a whole set of theatrical parasites — middle-men, impresarios, theatrical touts and syndicates which control, lease, and sub-lease the theatres. All that the audiences pay to get in — and you rarely see any empty seats in any theatre in Moscow — goes directly to the development of the theatre and those creatively engaged in the work of production.

Last, but not least, the State generously helps the theatre as it does any other art wherever and whenever such help is needed. If something is worth producing it is not abandoned because of considerations of cost. But these facts are hardly known to the outside world. The foreign correspondents in Moscow who gleefully rush to the Central Telegraph Office in Gorky Street every time they read some dramatist or writer being criticised in the Soviet Press have no time to worry about these trivial details. The Western conception of 'objectivity', after all, does not extend very far.

But what of the Soviet Cinema? I concentrated on the theatre because, though Soviet films are an education in seriousness and provide a welcome relief from the nightmare world of Hollywood triviality, vulgarity and insensate violence, it is possible occasionally to see them even outside the Soviet Union. One has no such opportunity of seeing the Soviet theatre. I did, however, go to see the *Fall of Berlin*, which is a sequel to the *Batt'e of Stalingrad*. It differs from the latter in that it is not just a documentary, but has a story running through it. The film has great virtues and some not inconsiderable defects. It is in colour and I am old

fashioned enough to have a bias in favour of the non-colour films, though I must add that the Soviet colour process is far superior to the trans-Atlantic technicolor or anything they have in Western Europe. But the real defect of the film for me, however, is that towards the end it has one or two false touches. For instance, I do not believe that a Russian girl, no matter how beautiful, would come out looking beautiful from a Nazi concentration camp after four years as Natasha, the heroine, does. The Nazis would have seen to that. My Russian friends explain that Natasha is meant to be more than an individual: she is a symbol, a symbol of the unconquerable and untarnished spirit of the Soviet people. As such she has to be represented in a certain ideality. The argument is not without force, but I am not sure that the precise solution which the directors of the *Fall of Berlin* have found is the best or most convincing.

However, the virtues of the film remain. Some of the impersonations of living or dead celebrities are remarkably authentic, especially those of Stalin, Kalinin, Hitler, Goebbels, Eva Braun. The man who acts the part of Stalin, a Georgian like the Generalissimo, is uncannily successful in evoking the personality he represents in looks, gestures, movements and the tone of his voice. There were moments when I could not help wondering whether Marshal Stalin, in addition to his many accomplishments, does not spend his spare time in acting his own part. Certainly, if the actor in question ever manages to get into the Kremlin there is bound to be a diverting comedy of errors. The scene of Hitler's marriage to Eva Braun in the deep shelter under the Chancellory is a most haunting essay in the macabre. But the greatest virtue of the film, a virtue which transcends all perfections of form and technique, is that it enables one to appreciate what the war meant to the Soviet people. Meant not only to this or that individual — that is not so hard to convey or apprehend; nor even the physical devastation and misery it brought in its wake, which is easy to evoke. No, its real virtue is that it communicates what the war meant to a whole people and what it meant spiritually.

There are many complex reasons to account for the gulf which divides the East from the West today. But I venture to suggest that one of the most important reasons is that the last war has had a very different meaning for the West and for the East. For the West, war was relatively a gentlemanly affair; if not quite cricket, at least nothing more serious than a somewhat hotly contested game of rugby. At times it became even unreal and remote. It was fought on foreign soil. After the battles were lost or won the captive generals could meet their captors over the breakfast table and indulge in friendly discussions of each other's tactical errors. This was certainly the case with the Americans in Europe; even with the British, after the brief anxieties of the Dunkirk and post-Dunkirk period and the six months of the blitz.

But to the Russians it was something quite different and very real. To them it meant the tortured flesh of somebody they knew and loved, the mutilation of their happiness on an unimaginably vast scale, the gutted ruins of farms and villages and towns and cities they had built with such loving care, not through the exploitation of far-off colonial territories but by their honest labour and in face of the opposition of the whole capitalist world. That is why, like Aloysha in the *Fall of Berlin*, they were in such a desperate hurry as they drove the Nazis back from the banks of the Volga across the Don and the Dnieper, across the Vistula and the Oder.

Such is the stuff of which humans are made that we cannot share the happiness which quivers through someone else's flesh. And as for the pain that stirs in someone else's heart, to feel it as one's own is beyond human compassion. The great virtue of the *Fall of Berlin* is that it nearly achieves the impossible. It communicates something of the Russian pain and something, too, as in the last scenes of the Red Army soldiers celebrating the capture of Berlin outside the Reichstag and the Chancellery, of their joy in victory — a joy the more poignant because for millions of them the sun of victory could not light up the dark core of grief.

## *GLIMPSES OF LENIN IN MOSCOW*

LENIN signed the first decrees defining the political, economic and social framework of the new Soviet State with a somewhat oversize but very ordinary dark green pen. The pen is duly preserved among the exhibits in the Lenin Museum in Moscow. The ink with which he wrote has not been preserved, but, perhaps, there was no need to preserve it. The whole of the Soviet Union is there to prove that it was indelible. The decrees themselves have been framed and can be seen in one of the rooms of the Museum. They make most instructive reading even at this distance for anyone seriously interested in the history of our times. For they impress one as possessing that true quality of revolutionary audacity which Danton called for but never actually himself succeeded in attaining. Before the fighting on the barricades had ended, the Soviet Government, headed by Lenin, was announcing its decisions on three fundamental issues — land, peace and the rights of the people.

One can imagine the horrified reaction of the gradualists, the Fabians, the apostles of 'Revolution by taxation' at what must have appeared to them sheer recklessness and adventurism. They would have asked for time: time to go round the problems rather than face them, to make decisions and to alter them. But Lenin had no indecision in his soul. He knew that a revolution cannot afford to wait on time and on events; it must usher in new time and make events. He knew that details can wait, but not the essentials: that people do not mind waiting for refinements such as bath plugs, refrigerators, motor cars, but they will not

wait for land. It was this crystal certitude, this clairvoyance in action which brought the masses on the side of the Revolution and engendered that deep sense of revolutionary loyalty which enabled an ill-equipped, almost untrained army of the people to defeat heavily-armed, professional mercenaries of the multi-national armies of intervention and counter-revolution after nearly three-fourths of Russia had been occupied by the latter.

Moscow, of course, is a city that abounds in museums. But among all these, there is no doubt that the Lenin Museum occupies a unique position of honour. And not only for the Muscovites. I had never thought it possible that one could spend so much time in a museum and yet not feel bored. The interest of this museum is not only that here one can see so much that is closely associated with the personality of Lenin—from his earliest essays in French composition to his plan for *State and Revolution* (the work on this last, it seems, was interrupted by what Lenin called “a happy accident”, the October Revolution). This purely personal interest is there, certainly. But its real interest derives from the fact that in presenting the life of Lenin in a cogent sequence it also succeeds in furnishing a lucid perspective of the decisive phase of the revolutionary movement in Russia. For rarely has the world witnessed so remarkable a coincidence of the curve of an individual life and the course of a great historical movement which was so profoundly to alter human destiny.

It is even possible to argue that in this coincidence we have the clue to one of the most striking traits in Lenin's character, namely, his single-mindedness and steadfastness of purpose. At no point in his life, not even during the bitter years of reaction which followed the abortive revolution of 1905, did he waver in his belief in the ultimate triumph of the cause of the proletariat, show any trace of ambivalence of loyalty, dilettantism of interest, infirmity of will. In fact, from the earliest period of his youth when he organised a students' strike at the Kazan university, which led to his expulsion, to

the day of his death in Gorky near Moscow, his life was dedicated to the working class movement. It was of a piece and of monumental consistency of aim and outlook. Consistency, and, one should add, an unfailing objectivity of understanding.

It is a wonder how Lenin was able to combine so much theoretical writing with his practical preoccupations with the details of the revolutionary movement. It is surprising especially because Lenin was a most conscientious writer. He took great pains with his work, planned each book and even articles carefully and read an enormous amount about and around the subject for the purposes of documentation. In the Lenin Museum one can see some of the books which he studied for his documentation, and I was particularly interested in what he read to work out his thesis on Imperialism. These include, among others, Meredith Townsend's *Asia and Europe*, the *Persian Revolution* by E.G. Browne, *The Partition of Africa* by Sir John Keltie, G.P. Gooch's *History and Historians*, Brailsford's *The War of Steel and Gold*, and rather unexpectedly Bamfylde Fuller's *Studies of Indian Life and Sentiment*. Some of the marginal comments on the books he read are very sharp and uncharitable. Of Schulze-Gaevertz, the author of *British Imperialism and British Free Trade*, he observes: "the greatest villain and charlatan". Yet he found the book useful and adds that it contains some interesting data.

Lenin could be sharply critical of others, but what is more significant, he could be critical of his own work. One finds many instances of what the communists call self-criticism. After working hard on his manuscript of *New Tasks*, *New Forces*, we find him commenting that the thesis is not satisfactory and that the basic ideas have not been "worked out to a conclusion." His manuscripts are on the whole very clean, though he sometimes doodled. When he felt dissatisfied with what he had written, he usually started from the beginning and there are few corrections or crossings-out on his MSS. Those who believe that a man's handwriting reflects his inner character will probably find some corroboration, if not confirmation.

of their theory in Lenin's writings. They are always very neat, firmly articulated, even in texture and evenly spaced, and without any ostentatious flourishes. His handwriting, in fact, would appear to have assumed a definite character very early and hardly changed at all in later life. The same quality of consistency characterises it as other aspects of his personality.

Vladimir Ilyitch had evidently an enviable facility for learning languages. Indeed, he had perfected a simple technique and system for this purpose. While learning foreign languages he would concentrate on learning first the nouns, then the verbs, and finally the grammar and syntax. This system worked well for him. For apart from Latin and Greek which he learnt at school, Lenin had a working knowledge of English, French, Polish, German and, I believe, Italian. His knowledge of foreign languages was useful to him in many ways. It enabled him to keep himself well informed and in touch with the revolutionary movements and political workers in other European countries. It also enabled him to read widely.

Literary and political interests do not normally go well together, but Lenin is the exception that proves the rule. He was not only fully conversant with Russian literature from Gogol to Gorky, but was an avid reader of world literature. In the Lenin Museum one can see his marked copies of Shakespeare (an edition printed in Paris), Goethe, Schiller, Moliere. Not only did he read a great deal of literature, but he set a standard for the Marxist critique of literature which to this day has not been uniformly attained by Marxist critics who have followed him. The series of articles on Tolstoy in which he defended the author of *War and Peace* against the attacks of ultra-Leftists and mechanical materialists provide an excellent answer to those who charge Marxism with a dogmatic approach to art and literature.

Lenin's career records abrupt fluctuations of fortune. He knew disappointment and he lived to taste triumph. It is a long way from Siberia to the Kremlin; from the life of an impecunious exile in Paris, Vienna, Zurich

during the years of the Stolypin reaction, to his work as the first Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars in the first Socialist state in world history. Yet all through these changes of fortune his mode of living remained very much the same. An impressive simplicity and lack of ostentation which goes with true greatness was always characteristic of him.

In the Kremlin he lived in a modest little flat; and his office, an exact replica of which can be seen in the Lenin Museum, would have been considered beneath the dignity of the permanent under-secretary at the foreign office of the smallest state in Europe. His clothes were not of Saville Row cut. You can see the various over-coats he wore during the last few years of his life, including the one which he was wearing when he was shot at by Kaplan, the young woman social revolutionary. Krupaskaya, with typical frugality, mended the bullet holes and Vladimir Ilyitch continued to wear this over-coat for the rest of his life.

As is well known, chess was Lenin's favourite pastime. In the Lenin Museum one can see the delicate and beautiful ivory chessmen and boards which the workers sent him as presents. But he seems to have preferred his old set which was with him in his exile and a chess table which he himself designed, with a secret drawer for hiding important documents. I was unable to ascertain whether there was a dog in Lenin's life. But there is no question that he was fond of cats. In the short documentary film of his life which they show at the Museum you can see him tenderly stroking a black and white creature who appears to be quite unaware of the importance of the occasion. But then cats are no respecters of persons.

One learns a great deal about Lenin's life and about the architectonics of successful revolutionary strategy in this Museum. But one learns something more. One gets some measure of the affection in which the peoples of the Soviet Union hold Lenin. For the Museum, which is open every day except Monday, is always crowded with people. You meet here schoolboys and schoolgirls, old

men and old women, factory workers and workers from the kolkhozes, Tadjiks and Ukrainians and all the other nationals of the Soviet Union listening with rapt attention to the impassioned guides explaining the significance of each exhibit.

There is nothing artificial about the interest which these people show in everything connected with Lenin's personality, for there is nothing artificial about a loyalty born of love for a great ideal which Lenin symbolises for them. From the Museum, the visitors invariably make their way to the Red Square to pay their homage to Lenin at the Mausoleum of red and black marble. I went, too, for it happened to be the anniversary of Lenin's death. The queue which I joined extended for half a mile from the Mausoleum down towards Hunters' Row and the Kremlin Gardens. It was snowing and we moved slowly forward, past the immobile sentries at the entrance, past the wreaths and flowers, down the steps and up again by the side of the platform upon which rests the glass case containing his body. Under the lights of reddish hue, the face looks as if it were modelled in translucent alabaster, the body in its Red Army tunic extraordinarily small and fragile.

It is not easy to define the feelings which the sight evokes in one. Bewilderment that so small and fragile a frame could have influenced the course of human civilisation so profoundly and become, as it were, a landmark dividing the past from the future. Sadness, too, since death must come even to a Lenin. "Immortality", a Marxist friend once said to me, "would be quite undialectical." But something also beyond bewilderment and beyond sadness — an urgent intimation of the infinite potentialities that reside in man. That is why one felt glad that the Soviets have not allowed the physical frame of one who inspired so much hope in so many human breasts to perish. For, surely, if the bones of the prehistoric mammals and the Cro-Magnon man are worthy of being preserved, the body of a Lenin deserves at least as much consideration.

## LIFE ON A KOLKHOZ

LENIN, it will be recalled, once defined Communism as Soviet Power plus electricity. That definition, however, needs some amplification in the light of the subsequent experience of the Soviet people. It is true that a Communist society presupposes Soviet power, that is capture of power by the organised working class and peasantry, and electrification. But it also requires something more: it requires kolkhozes (collective farms) to complete the picture. For it is indisputable that the level of prosperity which the Soviet Union has already achieved in so short a time and in the face of so many difficulties, and even more, the target of general well-being she has set herself, would be impossible to realise on the basis of small scale agriculture.

The creation of socialised heavy industry and collectivisation of agriculture were the two categorical imperatives for the development of the vast economic potential of the U.S.S.R. Without carrying out these two plans she could not have risen from the position of a backward, agrarian country to her present status of a great power. It is, therefore, important to understand what kind of institutions are these kolkhozes which constitute a specific and significant feature of the Soviet civilisation at the present stage.

It would be hazardous to make sweeping generalisations on the subject. Conditions vary from area to area and from kolkhoz to kolkhoz. There are kolkhozes which are equipped with all up-to-date conveniences, and there are others where the conditions of life probably still correspond to those of the early pioneering days in

America; kolkhozes whose gross annual income runs into several million roubles and kolkhozes which are too small to be so prosperous. For the purpose of objective study it is best to take an average collective farm; and the Soviet authorities were good enough to arrange for me to visit precisely such an average kolkhoz. For contrary to the insinuations fashionable among the anti-Soviet propagandists that the Soviet authorities take the visitors to certain show institutions to impress them, I found that my Soviet friends were anxious for me not to get any exaggerated notion of utopian perfection about the conditions of life in the U.S.S.R. In fact, they told me that, if I so desired, they would take me to kolkhozes fitted with *tout comforts moderns*, but that for their part they would prefer me to see something less ideal but more representative.

The choice was a collective farm situated some 150 kilometres from Moscow on the banks of the Oka River, in a countryside which Gorky describes so well in his *Artamonov Business*. After branching off from the Kazan highway, we had to drive over a track of frozen snow about ten kilometres to reach our destination. In the summer the track must be as dusty as the dirt roads of India, but it is characteristic of the contemporary situation in Russia that everything is in the process of change — even the dirt roads. Stones were piled at regular intervals all along the track and I learned that it was planned to start paving the road as soon as the flood waters of the coming spring have subsided. The Deputy Chairman of the collective farm, Comrade Shostov, a young man in his early thirties who lost his arm in the war, assured me that next time I visit Lubirtze (I must apologise for my spellings and transliteration of Russian names), I would not have to drive over a bumpy and uncertain track.

The village of Lubirtze stands on the left bank of the Oka, which in winter months serves the village youths as a vast skating rink. Approaching the village, the first thing that attracts one's attention is the church, which, with its characteristic Byzantine pumpkin domes.

stands out as a landmark in the flat and featureless landscape. But a landmark that belongs to the past. For the inhabitants of the village are too preoccupied with the tasks of setting the kingdom of the earth in order to concern themselves with the kingdom beyond.

The deity actually seems to be more in demand in the big Russian cities than in the countryside, paradoxical though it may sound. In the church at Lubirtze, I was told, there is no incumbent and the believers go to the next village in search of salvation. Most of the houses in the village are constructed of timber, though there are some of brick and stone. But these are largely civic buildings, with the exception of a brick bungalow which the collective farmers themselves built for one of their fellow-workers, a woman heroine of socialist labour, in appreciation of her excellent work at the farm.

The village has a population of about four thousand. Of these, four hundred and fifty families are directly engaged on work on the farm. Others indirectly depend for their livelihood on the kolkhoz. A stranger passing through the village would not easily suspect the amenities which the inhabitants enjoy. For it has a hospital, a secondary school, a kindergarten, a small theatre and a library with seven thousand volumes (among them Palme Dutt's *India To-day* in Russian and Nina Chechotkina's *India Without Miracles*).

The collective farmers themselves built their theatre, and though it is not elegant, it is quite adequate for the purpose it is meant to serve. The stage, though small, is better than anything that the citizens of Bombay and Delhi can boast of, for it is a real stage and not the platform of a lecture hall. It can also be used for showing films, and the collective farm possesses its own projector as also a radio transmitting set for relaying local programmes.

The administrative office of the collective farm is on the first floor of a timbered house which is distinguished from the others only by the Soviet flag that flies over it. Inside, there is no attempt at modernistic furnishings to impress one, only rough tables and wooden chairs. On

the walls there are graphs and charts showing the progress of the farm, photographs of heroes of socialist labour of whom there are eight (the honours being equally shared between the two sexes), and pictures illustrating some Michurinian mutations.

The farm, I was told, is mainly a dairy and stock-breeding farm, though lately they have been going in for grain production and have achieved considerable success with their crops of wheat and barley. Its main income, however, is derived from the sale of milk and milk products, cattle, livestock of different kinds. It also goes in for horse-breeding.

This kolkhoz qualifies for the title of a 'millionaire', that is, its collective income is over a million roubles per year. Indeed, during the post-war period the progress on the farm has been quite spectacular. In 1946, the gross income of the collective farm was just under one million five hundred thousand roubles; last year it was over two million four hundred thousand; and, notwithstanding the drastic price reductions, the estimated income of the farm for the current year is two million seven hundred thousand.

The growing prosperity of the kolkhoz is inevitably reflected in the growing prosperity of each individual worker on the farm. But that is not all. What is more important is that it means better living conditions for the whole village. Until a year ago, for instance, electricity was available only for operating the farm machinery, for the small flour mill and for pumping water from the tube wells. Last year, however, the collective purchased a bigger generator plant and now the whole village enjoys the benefit of electric light. Furthermore, a saw mill has been installed at the back of the church and comrade Shostov seemed to be specially proud of this new acquisition. He enthusiastically demonstrated to me how the mechanical saw cuts through giant logs of wood as though they were made of butter.

At this point one must stress one thing which is constantly being brought home to one in the Soviet Union, namely, the singularly even texture of the whole pattern of Soviet life. No matter at what level one comes in contact with it, in the countryside or in the great cities, on the Baltic or the Black Sea, it communicates the same urgent sense of a positive movement upward, of life striving always towards something better, fuller, richer, and striving consciously. And not only the sense of striving, but the sense of realisation as well.

Any reasonably objective visitor to the Soviet Union cannot fail to notice how everybody in this great country talks hopefully of the future. That is a most heartening experience. But I will add another observation. The future for which the Soviet people are living and working is not an abstract conception, a new variant of the pie-in-the-sky philosophy, the projection on the nebulous screen of years to come of the unrealised dreams and wishful fantasies of today. It is something real, tangible and concrete. Demonstrably so: for each month and each year they can see and feel it taking shape under the impact of their toil. It may be a new road or a saw-mill or the great forest belts, but it is always something directly related to their lives and something that is constantly in the process of becoming actual. It is this factor which partly accounts for the ambient and overwhelming optimism of the Soviet people, an optimism which did not forsake them even in the dark days when the Nazi armies were only a few hundred yards from the banks of the Volga.

There has been in the Western Press during the past two years, much wishful talk of the tension which, it was alleged, was developing between "the town and the country." The story was repeated to me by some diplomats whom I had the misfortune to meet in Moscow at a party, repeated in tones of discreet confidence. My own view is that this tension exists only in the diplomatic imagination. In Lubertze nobody expressed any feeling of envy for the dwellers in the great cities of the Soviet Union, nobody spoke of their interests having been

sacrificed for the benefit of the urban population. I asked my hosts at the kolkhoz whether they did not feel a little isolated in the country. They laughed at the suggestion and they told me how every few days they had visits from eminent professors and agronomists from Moscow to study the progress of some of their experiments, and how, in the summer, students from the various institutes came to help them in their work and in their turn be helped by them in understanding the practical problems of collective farming.

No, I saw no evidence of the tension between "the town and the country". For tension does not arise out of a conflict of abstract categories: it arises from conflict of interests and purposes between real people. And there is no such conflict of interests and purposes between the Soviet citizens who live and work in the towns and those who work in the countryside. They are both engaged in the same task and they know that they are so engaged, the task being nothing other than accelerating the transition from socialism to communism.

There is no question that the collective farmers in the Soviet Union today do not look upon themselves as 'poor relations' in the Soviet family. Rather, the reverse. in some ways they enjoy certain advantages over the urban workers. For the 'Artel', the specific form of co-operative agriculture which has been perfected after much trial and error and experiment, has not only enabled the workers on the kolkhozes to make rapid progress in mechanisation and modern technique, with an impressive degree of specialization, it still permits them individually to own a piece of land, some cattle and to use the produce from these for themselves. In fact, the standard of living, as far as food is concerned, is somewhat higher in the country than in Moscow. Two important recent developments deserve to be noted in this connection. One is the consolidation process which

involves the merger of smaller collective farms to create larger units which would permit of even more intensive and scientific development of agriculture; the second, and even more important, is the new idea of establishing *Agrograds*, or agricultural towns, which would enable the people of the countryside to enjoy all the amenities of city life.

But standard of living is not everything. The ultimate measure of human well-being is to be found in the dimension of the spirit, in the quality of life that people live, in the values which they accept. What type of personality does the collective farm produce? What kind of men and women are the people who live and work on these kolkhozes?

One can only generalise on the basis of one's own experience and that is necessarily limited. But for me, at any rate, the time spent with the workers on the kolkhoz at Lubirtze will remain memorable even among so many other memorable things that I saw during my Russian journey. I have not met anywhere in the villages of Western Europe, men and women so intelligent, well informed and deeply imbued with the outlook of a profoundly humanistic and democratic culture.

The old 'Mouzhik' who saw no further than his nose, and often not as far, is no longer extant in Russia: he survives today only in the Western World where the old peasant culture has disintegrated and nothing new and vital has come to take its place. But in the Soviet Union the countryside is pulsating with new life and new hopes.

True, the western observers rarely notice these intimations of a country-wide renaissance. They are too busy looking for weak spots and defects in the Soviet system to take note of its massive and manifest strength and its great virtues. The bourgeois eye, moreover, is blind to all but the externals, and it will not see anything worthy of note in simple and honest working people, without guile and perversity, such as those whom I met at the kolkhoz. The bourgeoisie has so long been obsessed with the world of appearances — and with keeping up appearances — that it sees no further than what peo-

ple wear, or the gadgets they own, or the bank balances they command. And the workers on the collective farm at Lubirtze are not smartly dressed. But the human spirit is not manufactured by tailors, and sartorial elegance is no proof of cultural and spiritual attainments.

Talking to my hosts at the farm I was struck by their mental alertness, their knowledge of contemporary world developments, their wide and uninhibited sympathies, their penetrating understanding. They asked me questions about India and I asked them questions about the Soviet Union; and there was never any difficulty in establishing a common language of discussion. And why should there have been such difficulty? Where else in the world would one meet a woman working on a farm like Vera Ivanovna? In her middle forties, she is a heroine of socialist labour. Deservingly so: for all the cows under her charge yield more than five thousand litres of milk per year. But she is not only a good worker and touchingly kind and compassionate. She is also a woman of great culture. She has read widely and knows all the works of Tagore which have been translated into Russian. What, she asked me, is my estimation of Tagore as a writer. I explained a pet theory of mine about human bridges. Tagore, I suggested, is one such bridge: a bridge between India's past and India's future. Her eyes lighted up with instantaneous comprehension. That is exactly what she had thought of the sage of Shantiniketan. "He is to India," she added, "what Tolstoy is to the Russian people." In almost twenty years of my life in Western Europe, I have never met a farm worker who had heard of Tagore or read Tolstoy.

## 8

## IN SEARCH OF TOLSTOY

ON the face of it, one is bound to think it highly paradoxical that the Soviet Union should preserve the memory and all that is associated with the life and work of Leo Tolstoy with such infinite care. For in many ways the outlook of the author of *War and Peace* represents the very antithesis of the world-view of Marxism. In his writings and in his mode of life, Tolstoy carried to the logical conclusion some of the other-worldly tendencies implicit in the original doctrines of primitive Christianity.

He found modern civilisation in most of its aspects intolerable. He rejected with what Lenin correctly characterised as "almost insane vehemence" the use of force under any circumstances. He elaborated a radical philosophy of 'non-violence' which is hardly likely to be acceptable to any revolutionary movement which believes with Marx that force often acts as "the midwife of the old order pregnant with the new."

The paradox, however, is more apparent than real. It arises from a misunderstanding of the Marxist outlook on life and literature. For Marxism, despite the imbecile vulgarisations and systematic distortions to which it is subjected by bourgeois critics, is not a dogmatic creed which judges and rejects things by a rule-of-thumb. It is a most comprehensive method of understanding and analysis, its basic maxim being that all phenomena, not least literary phenomena, have to be understood in all their complexity; that in the work of any writer the utmost care should be taken to differentiate what is positive and progressive in relation to the social urgencies of the

time, from what is retrograde and reactionary.

Lenin himself applied this analytical method to the work of Tolstoy in a series of articles in which he defended Tolstoy against his detractors. He went so far as to claim that Tolstoy was the "mirror" of revolutionary discontent; that by reflecting the decay and degeneration of the old feudal society and ruling class, by exposing its tragedies and its hypocrisies, and by revealing the broad base of human misery on which was built its edifice of luxury and extravagance, he rendered an invaluable service to the progressive movement in pre-revolutionary Russia. On the other hand, Lenin pointed out that Tolstoy was inhibited by the very nature of his upbringing, his social conditioning, and his identification with the "peasant mentality" to seek a revolutionary solution of the crises of his time. But Lenin insisted that the reactionary features of Tolstoy's outlook should not be allowed to obscure the positive world significance of his writings.

In view of Lenin's formulations on the subject, it is not surprising that the Soviet Government has from the very day of its capture of power devoted great attention to the task of popularising his work. Up to date, some fifty-six million copies of his books have been printed in the various languages of the Soviet Union, which means, on a rough calculation, that every home in the Soviet Union possesses at least one book of Tolstoy — a distinction which even Shakespeare can hardly claim in England. More than this, every item and detail bearing on his literary and political life has been carefully collected and recorded for the benefit of posterity in more than half-a-dozen museums which, under a decree of the Soviet Government, have been entrusted to the care of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences. Of these, the most important are the two museums in Moscow, two at Tolstoy's country home at Yasnaya Polyana, and one at the railway station of Ostopova (now renamed after Tolstoy) a few kilometres from Tula where Tolstoy died. The Moscow theatrical season is never complete without at least some of the dramatised versions of his novels being

included in the repertory. A definitive biography is at present in preparation and it will include, I understand, much new material which has not hitherto been available to the public.

I spent some time in the two museums in Moscow and it was well worth while. One learned more about the personality of Tolstoy during a few hours going round these museums than through volumes of painstaking, biographical exegesis. One of these museums is in a house which, before the Revolution, belonged to one of the nobles of the realm; and I cannot think of a more useful way of employing these stately homes of old Russia. It is situated in Krapotkinskaya and contains much literary data, manuscripts, first editions, some letters, the originals of some of the illustrations to his novels, and copies of many of the family portraits which are at Yasnaya Polyana. For anyone interested in Tolstoy, this museum is a veritable mine of information. It is arranged, as are almost all museums in the Soviet Union, in a scientific yet imaginative way.

It is interesting, for example, to know that the first draft of *The Cossacks* was begun, not in prose, but in verse; that, when during the defence of Sevastopol Tolstoy, who took part in the operations, wanted to edit a paper for the benefit of soldiers, the military authorities on orders from Moscow, promptly stepped in to prohibit him from attempting any such democratic venture.

Even more interesting are the specimens in Tolstoy's own handwriting of a simplified Russian alphabet which he worked out to make it easier for the peasants and their children to learn to read and write, and the special text-books he prepared for his school at Yasnaya Polyana.

Again, it is most revealing to read of his reactions to the triumphant capitalist civilisation of the West during his two visits to Europe. "Materially it is all very clean", he wrote to a friend, "but spiritually it is foul." The spectacle of the bedlam of the Bourse in Paris horrified him. So, too, did the treatment of children in English schools, especially the compulsory prayers for the king and corporal punishment.

Western interpreters of Tolstoy tend, for understandable reasons, to emphasise the passive elements in his philosophy, his doctrine of non-violence, his metaphysical and purely didactic preoccupations. The Soviets, for more valid reasons in my view, correctly attach greater importance to the revolutionary ingredients in his thought, his passion for social justice, his struggle against the terror and oppression of the Czarist regime, his association with the progressive movements and causes of his time. He was not taken in, for example, by the reformist pretensions of contemporary politicians. "Mere talk", was his apt comment on the decree in the early sixties abolishing serfdom. His activities on behalf of the oppressed peasantry frequently involved him in conflict with the police. His house was searched by the authorities who believed that it housed a clandestine press printing subversive literature.

Age did not make him more tolerant towards social evils and exploitation of man by man. If anything, it sharpened and deepened his discontent with the *status quo*. Though a believer in the doctrine of 'turning the other cheek', he welcomed the Revolution of 1905. The Revolution failed and there was the hideous aftermath of death sentences and police terror. It was then that he wrote his pamphlet *I Cannot Be Silent* which had to be published abroad and smuggled into Russia.

Tolstoy was a most conscientious writer. He took infinite pains to achieve verity in his novels and stories. While writing *War and Peace*, which took him six years to complete, he made a journey to Borodino battlefield to study the terrain in order to describe it accurately. One can see the maps and plans which he drew for his guidance to show the disposition of the opposing forces.

He generally wrote with a very fine pen, his writing slants sharply to the right, his pages are crowded and at times the writing is almost illegible. He wrote and re-wrote, corrected and recorrected his manuscripts. And not only manuscripts. He made endless alterations and corrections in the proofs. Thus he was not only the despair of his wife Sophia who used to make fair copies

of his writings, but of his printers. They protested almost in tears, but in vain. There is a passage, a description I believe of Katusha in *Resurrection*, which is only fourteen lines. Tolstoy wrote twenty different variations of it before he decided on the final draft. Inevitably, this conjures up visions of Flaubert playing games of chess or tossing a coin to decide which particular adjective to use. But the comparison is only superficial. Flaubert's was the incertitude and hesitancy of an aesthete in search of an impossible and abstract ideal of literary perfection which deep down in his heart he knew to be only an illusion. Tolstoy's was the quest after truth and reality. "Truth", he was to observe elsewhere, "is the real hero of my stories."

The second Tolstoy Museum in Moscow is in what must have been in Tolstoy's time the very outer suburb of the city — a district known as the Khamovniki. It is in the house which he occupied for seventeen winters. He found city life intolerable, but had to put up with it since it was necessary to have a town house during the period when the children were growing up and their education had to be attended to. It is a two-storeyed timber-framed house and, for one who belonged to the highest nobility, rather modest. Only a wooden fence separates it from the street and the front is unimposing. As you enter the small hall, the dining room is on the right on the ground floor. Everything has been preserved just as it was during Tolstoy's life. One sees the dinner table laid ready for the family to walk in and ring for the meal to be served. Sophia, of course, sat at the head of the table, but it was Tolstoy who served the soup. There are, I noted, two different soup bowls. The large one was meant for the family and the small one for Tolstoy's special vegetarian concoction.

The main reception-room and the drawing-room are on the first floor. But these were really Sophia's terri-

tory, though on occasions Tolstoy did participate in the gay parties, receptions and even masquerades which his wife organised. Indeed, the old housekeeper told me, with nostalgic relish, of a fancy-dress ball held in the house where old Tolstoy met on the landing another man receiving the guests dressed up as Tolstoy, complete with the beard.

Except on rare occasions, however, Tolstoy spent most of his time in his study which is at the back, isolated from the house. It has two windows, one of them opening on to the garden at the back. The furniture is simple, even austere — the large table which served as writing-desk; a chair with the legs sawn off low to enable Tolstoy, who was short-sighted but obstinately refused to use spectacles, to read and write without having to bend over the table; a bookcase; some easy chairs and a sofa covered in black leather; two smaller tables, one of them with adjustable legs so that, if he wished, he could write standing. The floor is bare wooden boards. Tolstoy himself only used the two candles on the table for lighting, but when friends or people came to see him, as a concession to them a small oil table-lamp, with a green shade, was lit.

Just before one enters the study, on the left, there is a small dressing room opening on to the passage. Here you can still see the clothes and shoes Tolstoy wore, his working tools (for he strictly adhered to the rule that each man must daily perform some useful manual work), dumb-bells for exercise each weighing seven pounds. Here I also saw an object which I had never associated with the sage of Yasnaya Polyana — a bicycle. Evidently it was a present to him from some friends who thought it was better for him to go and bring water from the communal pump on a bicycle than on horseback. He learned to ride it in a day, I was told. The bicycle is a very early model Rover, made in Coventry, and has only one brake, and that, incredible though it may sound, for the front wheel. A most hazardous contrivance to ride, especially with a bucket of water in one hand. But then in those days there was not much traffic in the street and,

in any event, Tolstoy probably was not a fast rider.

Aldous Huxley in an essay written during his less mystical days refers wittily to the pilgrims "who follow in the train." But in my opinion the pilgrims who follow in a car can be considered even more fortunate. They can enjoy the landscape better; they can linger on the way; and they can choose more or less their own pace. I cannot, therefore, be too grateful to the Soviet Writers' Union who arranged for me to accomplish a long wished for pilgrimage to Yasnaya Polyana in a car. For although the two museums in Moscow were interesting, Yasnaya Polyana has, for any serious student of Tolstoy's work, a special significance and attraction. He lived here for almost sixty years, wrote most of his great novels; here he experienced much of the contentment, if not happiness, of his early married life and the tragic quietudes and frustrations of his later years.

We started from Moscow at eight in the morning, an early hour in these northern latitudes. But Moscow is an incredibly busy place and we drove past trams and trolley-buses unloading workers on their way to and back from work after the night-shift. We drove through the outskirts where small picturesque timber houses stand side by side with tall blocks of workers' flats. We drove on to the main Moscow-Kharkov highway.

The road, reminiscent of the autobahns I had seen in Germany, once again set in motion a train of imaginary polemics. I remembered Liddell Hart's book, *The Other Side of the Hill*, in which he advances the startling, but now fashionable, thesis that what defeated the Nazis was not the heroic Russian resistance, but the bad Russian roads. I marvelled at the capacity of the human mind to deceive itself. Bad roads, indeed! If Hitler's mechanised columns could not get to Moscow along such broad highways, then perhaps they needed Russians to provide them with transport. And that is precisely how in the

end they did get to Moscow, but as prisoners, not conquerors.

However, the virginal beauty of the snow-covered earth in the early morning light was too poignant to continue argument with blind prejudice. The flat landscape around Moscow gave way gradually to gentle undulations, accentuated here and there by clusters of firs and silver birches which, in Russia, have a white bark of rare purity. Snow and the absence of the hedgerows, characteristic of the West European landscape, communicate to the heart and the eyes a sense of immensity which is almost like a palpable presence. The Soviet Union, much more than even India and China, is a land of vast and tempting distances.

We drove past small towns and villages, and we crossed the Oka, a tributary of the Volga and a sizeable river in its own right, but in winter indistinguishable from the vast snowscape. On the way, we passed many a horse-sleigh, a slow but still a useful and pleasant means of transport.

About one hundred kilometres from Moscow we overtook the car of the Director of the Yasnaya Polyana Museum. A grave and squarely built man in his late forties, Professor Popov, who is a veteran of the Civil War and the War of Liberation, had been to Moscow in connection with arrangements, already well advanced, for the fortieth anniversary of Tolstoy's death which falls later this year. And he had cut short his stay to return and show me round the place personally.

At Tula, famous for its samovars and rifles, we branched off the main Moscow-Kharkov highway on to a frozen country road and a few minutes' drive brought us to the entrance of Tolstoy's country house, with two round white towers which Tolstoy's maternal grandfather built to assert his independence of the Court at Moscow. For in those days the chief route to the South, known as the Ambassadors' Way, passed by the Volkonsky estate. One drives up to the house through a stately avenue of fir trees, the famous "prospect" which is described in *War and Peace*. On the right is the pond, just

now frozen like all the waters in Russia, where Sophia in one of her fits of depression tried to drown herself.

Comrade Popov suggested that we should stay the night with him so as to have time to see everything at leisure and also to visit the Yasnaya Polyana school, hospital and orphanage, an offer which I gladly accepted. He took us to his flat on the first floor of the Volkonsky House which now serves as the office, and showed me my room where he pointed to a portrait of Tolstoy by Ripin which enjoys the curious distinction of never being exhibited in public. It shows the Russian sage barefooted; and Tolstoy, who apparently never went barefooted, insisted that it should never be displayed.

After our lunch which included a bowl of delicious Ukrainian *borsch*, the like of which I had never tasted before, we started on our sight-seeing tour. There are two separate museums. The one in the main Tolstoy mansion has been preserved exactly as it was during Tolstoy's lifetime. It contains everything associated with his personality and his family. The second is a smaller building and contains his literary remains: manuscripts, first editions, translations of his writings into various languages of the Soviet Union. The main building is a pleasant two-storeyed house, graceful but unostentatious, rather reminiscent of some of the simpler 18th century country houses of England.

The Nazis, when they occupied Yasnaya Polyana for a brief period, turned it into a barrack for soldiers. Most of the furniture and books had fortunately been evacuated, but the few things that were left behind were burnt as firewood or ransacked. And as the final demonstration of European culture which they were defending against the Bolsheviks, they set fire to two of the rooms before they left and, indeed, the whole place would have been gutted if their retreat had not been somewhat precipitate. The local partisans were able to put out the fire and save the house.

I could not help remembering how the Russians, when they occupied Weimar, behaved. Almost the first act of the Commandant of the occupying force was to

lay wreaths on the tombs of Goethe and Schiller and get busy on the task of restoring Goethe's house and Schiller's house which the Americans had, rather needlessly, bombed. But, then, the Soviets believe in materialism; and the Westerners are believers in moral and spiritual values.

The damage to Tolstoy's house has all been repaired and the place is once again just as it was when Tolstoy, sick in body and perhaps even more troubled in mind, got up from his bed in the middle of the night, dressed, went downstairs, woke his doctor, ordered his groom to get the carriage ready, and left the house, without letting anyone in the family know about his departure, on a journey from which he was never to return alive.

The hall through which one enters, like everything else in the house, is without any trace of luxury. There are some bookcases containing a part of his library of nearly 23,000 books, but there is also a glass cupboard containing such lethal weapons as guns and pistols reminding one not only of Tolstoy's less non-violent phase when he was fond of hunting, but also of the complexities and contradictions of his inner being. The hall leads into a pleasant oblong room which opens straight on to the front lawn, sloping down to the Prospect. In later years it was used as a guest-room, but at one time it served as Tolstoy's study and actually figures in *Anna Karenina* as Levin's study.

In the dining and reception room on the first floor one sees all the family and ancestral portraits. On the wall facing one as one enters are two portraits of Tolstoy himself, one as a comparatively young man and the other in his old age; of Sophia his wife; of Titania his elder daughter who took after her mother; and Maria, a sweet, angelic, almost other-worldly creature who was much closer in spirit to Tolstoy and whose death a few years before his own was to add to his cup of bitterness. On the other wall, facing these, are the portraits of the ancestors, among them both his paternal and maternal grandfathers who are portrayed in *War and Peace* as the old Count Rostov and Bolkonsky.

We were accompanied on our visit to the Tolstoy house, among others, by Mr. Bulgakov who was Tolstoy's secretary during the last year of his life. He is a kindly old gentleman, profoundly interested in India. He spoke of his meeting with Tagore when the poet visited the Soviet Union. (Later in the evening he was to sing to us some of the Pushkin songs which were Tolstoy's favourites).

Mr. Fet, a much younger man, who acted as our guide, explained to us at length and in impassioned tones the history and associations of each object as we went through the rooms in the house. Listening to him, one's mind tended to wander off on an unfamiliar track of its own choice. How strangely irrelevant, one thought, appear the things with which men surround themselves in life. How could one connect, for example, the author of *Kreutzer Sonata* with the earliest models of the phonograph which Thomas Alva Edison presented to Tolstoy? How could one establish a point of correspondence between the man who wrote the *Death of Ivan Ilyitch* and the chess table on which the same man played seven hundred games? Or, what inner nexus could one discover linking Brokhouse and Eforov's Encyclopaedic Dictionary and the hand that wrote marginal notes in that work under articles dealing with Marx, Lao Tse, Confucius, the Koran?

And yet these strange irrelevancies in some peculiar way also reflect the personalities of their owners. One sees this clearly at Yasnaya Polyana and in Tolstoy's Moscow house. One has only to compare Tolstoy's study, where the dominating piece of furniture, incidentally, is a leather-covered sofa on which not only Tolstoy himself saw the light of day, but all his children were born, with Sophia's room to understand the gulf of temperament and interests which separated the two. Sophia, a strong-willed woman of the world, bound up with family interests, fond of society; and Tolstoy a Titanic, unquiet spirit in a mortal frame, possessed of a terrifying honesty and deeply aware of the moral and social ills of the world in which he lived. Disharmony between such a conjunction of personalities was inevitable.

The careful, imaginative and almost tender way in which the Soviet Academy of Sciences has preserved everything associated with Tolstoy is deserving of the highest praise. Yet the very perfection of their achievement of the task entrusted to them accentuates the inexorable sense of melancholy which broods over all habitations from which life has departed. This is so at Yasnaya Polyana. One looks at the chairs arranged around the dining table and one's eyes search in vain for the diners. One sees the cups on the table and one wants to go and look in the next room for those who drank from these cups. And then, suddenly, one remembers that no one will ever drink from these cups or sit on these chairs again; and one is sharply reminded of the transience of human life and the curious persistence of the inanimate universe. Even a fragile piece of China or glass may well outlast the heart of a Tolstoy.

No such sad thoughts disturb one, however, as one walks over the snow-covered pathway that leads to Tolstoy's grave deep in the woods. He had himself chosen the spot where he wished to be buried and he insisted that no monument should be built over his grave. And what monument of marble or bronze or gold could be more effective and eloquent than the tall, graceful birches, some of them with bark that is the colour of beaten silver? It was already dusk when we got to the grave and over the woods there was a stillness that was like a muted benediction. The grave itself is just what Tolstoy maintained was all that a man ultimately needs on earth: a few square feet of ground. In the summer, the local inhabitants and thousands of visitors who come from all parts of the Soviet Union bring flowers of homage to lay on the grave. But in the winter, it is covered with nothing heavier than fir branches laced together by delicate threads of snow.

Beyond the grave the ground falls into a fold between two undulations. In Tolstoy's time, it was possible to see something of the distant horizon, something, too, of the famous Kalinova Meadow. But in the years between, saplings have grown into giant trees and obliterated the

view. After much discussion, the ruthless Russians have now decided to cut down some of these trees in order to open out the view of the sky and the beautiful meadow which Tolstoy loved so.

## THE JOURNEY TO TBILISI

AIRPORTS all the world over possess a certain striking similitude. They are all situated some distance from the cities which they serve; they are functionally designed; and they suggest to the traveller the same air of reassuring, if somewhat impersonal, efficiency. Airports in the Soviet Union conform to this general pattern; yet there is something that unmistakably distinguishes them from airports anywhere else. It is not the style of architecture, nor the procedural formalities for handling the passengers: it is the passengers themselves. They are quite unlike the people whom one normally associates with the luxury of air travel. Instead of self-important business executives, industrial and financial magnates for whom time is money, the heirs of company directors and various other species of V.I.Ps., one finds oneself mingling with ordinary working people. Instead of immaculately and fashionably dressed men and women, one meets a cross-section of the working population who are not particular about their clothes and their appearance. They might be Red Army soldiers or Stakhanovite miners or girls from some poultry farm with cages of cackling Michurinian hens, but it is largely the people who live by their own labour rather than those who thrive on the labour of others.

In this sense a visit to any Soviet airport is in itself a kind of education. It brings home to one sharply the social transformation that has flowed from the October Revolution and it reveals something of the essential difference between the Soviet and the non-Soviet world.

My first experience of a Soviet airport was that of

Moscow. And Moscow is not really representative. For it handles considerable international traffic. Here the East and the West, the Soviet and the non-Soviet world, inevitably come into a polite but transitory conjunction; and that confuses the picture. Fortunately, however, I saw the airport at Moscow in the unconfused hour before dawn.

Our plane was scheduled to leave at four in the morning and most of the international routes do not begin to function before six. In fact, when we reached the airport about three, it was all but deserted, except for the half-a-dozen passengers who were taking the Kharkov-Rostov-Krasnodar-Sukhum-Tbilisi route. And they were indubitably authentic Soviet citizens — three of them Red Army soldiers going as far as Kharkov, a functionary from Sukhum on the Black Sea, a worker from Tbilisi, and my friend and guide Madame Grayevskaya from the Soviet Writers' Union. One could certainly meet the same type of traveller in the West, too, but not at an airport. The third class waiting room at a railway station is the more likely place.

Travellers' tales about the Soviet Union are often entertaining, but seldom accurate. I had read and heard a good deal about the exasperating unpunctuality of Soviet planes (and trains), of the mysterious, bureaucratic gremlins who manage to insinuate themselves into aero-engines and cause hours, even days of frustrating delays. I was, therefore, fully prepared for the worst. But I was pleasantly surprised that none of these contingencies materialised. The plane started punctually at the scheduled hour and the take-off was without as much as a jerk. (I have yet to meet more responsible and careful pilots).

A fair-haired girl with a soft, captivating voice who, I later learned, was born in Siberia but brought up in Tbilisi served as the air-hostess. If the passengers in the plane were quite unlike air passengers anywhere else, our air-hostess was certainly quite unlike air-hostesses one meets on commercial air lines. She wore no smart uniform and her beauty was not the synthetic product turn-

ed out by beauty parlours to order: it had the freshness and naturalness of a spring morning. Her presence, indeed, radiated a friendliness quite different from that commercial charm and geniality which can be so expansive and yet so vacuous.

I have a preference for land journeys. They are rich in possibilities of human contact and have a satisfying quality of tangibility. Sea voyages possess mystery and enchantment. The mystery belongs to the sea, but the enchantment is in the landfall. Aerial journeys, on the other hand, have a sense of dream-like unreality, possibly because air is an element in which man is still not altogether at home. This sense of unreality was heightened for me by the darkness outside the window of the plane. All one could see was the green navigational light on the tip of the wing, and beyond, the seemingly measureless abyss of space.

Kharkov came after two and a half hours of flight through the unknown; and it came with an icy blast of air as the door of the plane was opened. The Red Army soldiers gathered their kit bags and left us, while a long-haired and rather Bohemian looking youth got in. The plane took off again and by now the darkness was dissolving into the first, unassertive intimation of the light of dawn. The milky dimness turned into rose; the rose flowered into the vast golden splendour of an aerial apocalypse, revealing our plane gliding a few thousand feet above a white and billowy sea of clouds. The propellers revolved, like some exquisitely delicate, transparent wings of a restless moth, fluttering against the heart of the sun.

We descended over Rostov through a break in the clouds. The plane circled over the city and over the curving Don, curled up in its quiet winter sleep. At the airport there was less snow, but more slush. The airport itself looked a makeshift affair. The Germans destroyed the old airport and the Russians have not yet rebuilt it. Houses are more important than airports. After half an hour's halt for refuelling, we flew southwards again over the low-lying plain between the Don and the

Kuban. It is a flat landscape, intersected by innumerable streams and rivers which open out into muddy estuaries that flow into the Sea of Azov.

We had left the clouds behind and one noted a singular feature of the contemporary Russian landscape which is not so obvious from ground level. Though the Russians do not approve of the geometrical abstractions of modern Western art, looking at their landscape from the air one has the illusion that it has been arranged by some supreme Euclidean mind. The patchwork quilt of narrow strips of land and small hedge-bound fields of Western Europe have practically disappeared in Russia with collectivisation. Instead, the scene arranges itself in an endless succession of great rectilinear shapes, neat and orderly like playing fields, stretching from horizon to horizon, with (in winter) white stripes of snow-covered roads articulating the boundary lines.

Krasnodar was our next airport of call. Here for the first time, one felt the invisible fingers of the sun urgent with warmth against one's flesh. The greenshoots of grass intimated the proximity of spring and the passengers shed the unenviable burden of their overcoats and fur caps. Talk flowed more easily. The functionary from Sukhum began to paint the beauty of his home town in glowing colours. Why, he asked us, were we in such a hurry to get to Tbilisi? Could we not break our journey, even if only for a day, at Sukhum? There is so much to see at Sukhum. After all, it was not for nothing that workers from far off Vladivostok and Okhotsk and Kamchatka came all the way to spend their holidays at Sukhum. And, as a final argument, he said with a touch of local patriotism: "You know we keep all the good travellers in Sukhum. Only the bad ones we allow to go to Tbilisi." Sukhum sounded tempting enough, but pressed as we were for time, I had to resist the temptation — even at the risk of being excluded from the company of the proverbial "good travellers."

A few minutes' flight from Krasnodar, and the flat landscape of the Kuban gave way to the foothills and slopes of the Northern Caucasus. An almost impercep-

tible swerving of the nose of the plane westward brought us right over the Black Sea. I do not know why it is so named. For when I saw it, its water was the colour of emerald, tremulous under the touch of a gentle breeze.

The coast line, at first rugged and steep, gradually sloped down to enchanting shores of glittering shingle. Sukhum itself was as flat as a pancake. It disappointed me somewhat, not because I found it wanting in all the loveliness with which the ardent Sukhumite (if one may coin the term) had invested it in my imagination, but because it was cold, much colder, in fact, than Krasnodar. I had been promised mimosas, associated in my mind, quite inexplicably, with Proust's "*les jeunes filles en fleurs*", but I found hardly a tree in bud. But, then, it had been, I was told, an unusually severe winter in Sukhum as elsewhere in the Soviet Union this year. There had even been snow which is quite abnormal. And torrential rains had washed away the bloom from the trees which had been reckless enough to put out buds and flowers.

The last lap of the journey was uneventful, but dramatic. The plane flew south-east, almost diagonally across the Caucasus. It climbed steeply to clear the mountain range which has many things in common with the Himalayas. For the Caucasus, like the Himalayas, once lay under the sea; and like the Himalayas they have a grandeur, an untamed and almost terrible beauty which one misses in the much more ancient Alpine heights. But before one had savoured the full magnificence of the panorama, our plane was already flying over the valley of the Kura River and the barren hills encircling Tbilisi lay beneath us, like prehistoric mammoths cast in stone. We landed at Tbilisi airport, which undoubtedly looked national in form and socialist in content, exactly twelve hours after leaving Moscow.

According to the omniscient anti-Soviet experts, the Soviets arrange everything in their country so as to impress the visitors, going, allegedly, even to such absurd lengths as to distribute new sets of clothes to whole cities in order to impress half a dozen foreigners. Those

who can believe such things can believe anything. My own impression, for what it is worth, is quite the reverse. The Soviets are far too busy with the tasks of construction and reconstruction to trouble themselves about appearances, public or private. For instance, as far as I know, they have not got any special five year plan for roads that lead to or from airports to the cities they serve. The road from the airport at Tbilisi to the city could certainly do with repairs; and even the all-knowing experts on Russia can hardly suggest that these repairs are beyond the capacity of the Georgian Soviet Republic.

But all Soviet planning is on the basis of strict and rational priorities; and in their order of priorities the construction of new blocks of flats for workers, of schools, of embankments and parks of culture and universities come much higher on the list than the comfort of the few foreign tourists. So it was only the excellent springs of the new Victory car which saved certain parts of one's body from suffering violence as we drove through the broad valley, of the colour of camel hair, towards the legendary city of warm waters.

## TBILISI NOT TIFLIS

WHAT is there in a name? The answer is that, often, there is a great deal in a name. At least, the Georgians think so. For them the capital of their Republic would not smell or sound half so sweet if it were called by its pre-revolutionary name, Tiflis, as it is in fact still designated on atlases printed in the West. They prefer to know it by its true and historic name — Tbilisi.

One can understand their strong feelings in this matter of nomenclature. The term Tiflis is for them the symbol and reminder of an unhappy past of servitude and national humiliation under Czarist rule. On the other hand the word Tbilisi not only evokes memories of a great and historic past, but symbolises the freedom which the Revolution brought to the people of Georgia. To begin with, the freedom to have their own proper names and use their own language. That may mean little to some people, but the Georgians attach the greatest importance to it.

For they are a proud people, as proud of their contemporary achievements in building a socialist society as of their ancient cultural heritage. In terms of population, they are less numerous than the Irish with whom they share many things. For like the Irish they have an exuberant temperament and passionate love of independence, a combination of shrewdness and almost extravagant romanticism, of graciousness and a sense of humour.

No Georgian thinks of his nation as small or insignificant. Most of them, in fact, share the sentiment expressed by Simon Chik'ovani in a poem which has the challenging refrain "Who says my native land is small?"

And why not? For they can justly claim that they have made greater contribution to the sum of human culture than other, more numerous people. The first wine-press, they insist, was perfected in Georgia, and Stalin was born at Gori of which Constantine Tchitchindadze has written:

Gori is K'art'li's mother who

With her full breast feeds Georgia's youth.

And this pride is not just empty boastfulness. It is part of a profound sense of collective self-confidence which is essential to the moral health of a nation. The interesting as well as the significant thing about this pride is that it is universal: one meets it at every level. I remember, for instance, that the very first thing that the manager of the Intourist Hotel at Tbilisi, where I stayed, told me was about the great antiquity of the capital of the Georgian Republic. "Moscow" he said, "has only last year celebrated the 800th anniversary of its foundation. We in Tbilisi will soon be celebrating the 15th centenary of the foundation of our city." He went on to point to a set of frescoes on the wall of the lounge, in characteristic classical Georgian style of painting, which depicted the legend of the founding of Tbilisi. The legend has it that King Vakhtang was once out hunting in the valley of the Kura River. He shot a bird, but the bird, though wounded, continued to fly for some distance till it dropped dead into a pool of water. When the king's attendants picked it up they found that it was already cooked. The pool was in fact a spring of warm and healing waters. Thereupon the King decided to found his capital on the spot.

A charming legend no doubt, but legend is one thing and reality quite another. Despite its legendary warm springs, I found the capital of Georgia still in the throes of a protracted winter. A cold wind blew from the chain of snow-covered mountains, and, apart from the evergreens and cypresses, all other trees were still bare skeletons. Yet it was not a winter of discontent for the citizens of Tbilisi. On the contrary, they were in a festive and gay mood. The streets were decorated with banners, and coloured lights at night. Later, I came to

know the reason for these festivities. By an unpremeditated coincidence, I had arrived in Tbilisi just to be in time for the celebration of the 29th anniversary of the Soviet Republic of Georgia.

Tbilisi is a city with a somewhat ambiguous physiognomy, a strange blend of the old and the new, of the East and the West. Its modern phase does not stretch more than thirty years, an insignificant period when contrasted with the historic past of the city which can be traced back as far as the 4th century A.D. But, as Marx once observed, there are periods of history during which developments of centuries are packed into a few decades; and the past three decades have been a momentous period in the history of Georgia and its capital.

Tbilisi has made great strides towards modernity. One can still see the old and narrow cobbled streets, with the gutters running down their middle, clambering up the two hillsides between which flows the wilful Kura. But a great part of the city has been almost entirely rebuilt and redesigned, whole streets widened and new embankments constructed; and this new Tbilisi is a city of modern buildings of steel and concrete, of elegant boulevards and parks, of majestic avenues lined with cypresses and mimosas. It bears eloquent witness to the immense constructive activity of the people of Georgia since the Revolution. The most important and most beautiful street in Tbilisi, incidentally, is called Rustaveli Street after the great poet who lived during the reign of Queen Tamara. I could not help recalling that in the capital of India there is only a mean little lane called after Tagore while obscure and forgotten British pro-consuls are still remembered in the names of some of the most important highways and streets.

But, then, Georgia has had a Revolution, not merely a transfer of power. And here I must record a conclusion that has been gradually crystallising in my mind in the course of this Russian journey. The conclusion is simply this: there is no such thing as a silent revolution in human affairs. A Revolution, when it is real and not merely a confidence-trick enabling the old firm to

continue under a new and more respectable name, can never remain silent. It is bound to manifest itself in a thousand ways, to articulate itself through every facet of a people's life, to transform not only the whole moral and social framework of a country, but give entirely new significance to institutions inherited from the past. This has certainly been the case with the Soviet Revolution. It has been something in the nature of a vast process of alchemy under which big as well as small things have suffered a transformation.

I noticed with considerable pleasure, for example, that the palace which during the Czarist days used to be the headquarters of the Muscovite satraps, a kind of Georgian Viceregal lodge if you will, has been turned into the Palace of the Pioneers. The corridors, the reception halls, the ante-chambers through which once fluttered liveried bureaucrats and their bejewelled spouses now ring with the glad sound of the song and laughter of the future citizens and rulers of Georgia. Could one ask for a more appropriate monument to the Revolution?

As a city, Tbilisi seems to have length rather than breadth. Circumscribed by the two hills which flank the river, its expansion has been along the curve of the Kura. Today it has a population of about six hundred thousand and is a considerable industrial centre, with both light and heavy industries. A new steel plant is nearing completion not far from the city. Indeed, the construction work going on in Tbilisi somewhat overwhelms an outsider by its amplitude: in and around the city one can see more housing projects and industrial construction in progress than in half a dozen provinces of India put together. But then, it is quite inaccurate to describe Tbilisi as a provincial city. It does not communicate the sense of being just a provincial backwater, nor do the citizens of Tbilisi give the impression of being haunted by that ineffectual feeling of self-pity and pathos, of unheroic frustration and unfulfilled purpose which was characteristic of the provincial life of pre-revolutionary Russia, and which Chekov has captured so well in his plays. And, for the excellent reason that here, as elsewhere in

the Soviet Union, the people are caught up in the infectious *élan* of a heroic age of construction and reconstruction.

There is much that is worth seeing in Tbilisi. There is the famous Alvabaya Press to which entrance used to be through a deep well where Stalin and the Georgian revolutionaries printed their underground newspaper. There is the Pantheon of Georgian Writers half-way up the Mount St. David. There is the impressive Park of Culture and Rest which crowns the Mount St. David and from which one can get a magnificent panoramic view of the whole valley of the Kura and of the distant chain of mountains. At night, from this elevation, one can see the city beneath glittering like a gem.

But what struck me as most beautiful in the capital of Georgia was its trees — cypresses, mimosas, and firs — all of which have been planted by the hand of man. For around Tbilisi was once a valley almost bare of any vegetation. But this wilderness of rock and stone has been transformed within the lifetime of a single generation into a valley of rich and flowering orchards. This development, in a profound way, symbolises the transformation of Georgia and of the whole Soviet East since the Revolution.

To understand the full implications of this transformation, it is essential to know something of the historical background of Georgia. For Georgia has known much glory and much tragedy. Between the 11th and the 13th centuries, the period which constitutes the classical golden age of Georgia, it was the centre of a great and flourishing culture. It produced enlightened and energetic monarchs like Vakhtang Gorgasal, David the Builder who consolidated a powerful kingdom stretching from the shore of the Caspian to Erzerum and Trebizon, from the foothills of the Caucasus to the Araxes, and Tamara whose legendary loveliness haunts even the imagination of the austere Communist poets of Soviet Georgia.

And not only great kings and queens, but also poets, men of letters and philosophers. The Georgian court, indeed, became one of the most important cultural foci

in the Near East, attracting a whole galaxy of gifted writers — Shota Rustaveli whose *Knight in the Tiger's Skin* is a world classic; the mysterious monk Shavteli whose *Abdul-Messiah* (The Slave of Christ) can be read with pleasure even by those who have no taste for stigmata and mystical self-abasement; and Chakhrukhadze famous for his cycle of odes in praise of Queen Tamara entitled *Tamariani*.

But the golden age was followed by dark centuries of national humiliation, economic stagnation and political servitude. Georgia was ravaged by repeated invasions by the Mongols, Turks and Persians and knew only brief interludes of peace. Towards the end of the 18th century the feudal rulers of Georgia, in sheer desperation, accepted the incorporation of their realm in the Russian Empire as the lesser of the many evils confronting them. This move, it is true, brought the Georgian intelligentsia into direct contact with the radical political and intellectual trends of 19th century Russia, but it did not lighten the burden of misery for the people. Rather, it accentuated the oppression; it added the colonial yoke to the feudal tyranny. Czarist imperialism rigorously suppressed all manifestations of national culture, even denying the people the use of their own language.

The contemporary phase of Georgian history begins only with the effective establishment of Soviet power in February 1921. The Revolution liberated the energies and enthusiasms of a naturally gifted and spirited people for constructive tasks. The enlightened policy of the Soviets in regard to the nationalities problem proved not only to be good Marxism, but good sense. It paid rich dividends and for the first time broke the wall of suspicion and mistrust which had made co-operation between the Russian and Georgian peoples impossible under Czarist rule. The results of this co-operative effort have been truly spectacular. In less than thirty years, Georgia has moved from the Middle Ages right into the 20th century.

Some statistics will show what this means in economic terms. Until the Revolution, Georgia was largely a backward agrarian country with the majority of people

living at an incredibly primitive level. A few light industries and the manganese mines at Chiature (in which, significantly, the American millionaire diplomat, Harriman, enjoyed substantial concessions) were the only industries it possessed. Today it has not only a wide range of light industries but also heavy industries: it produces not only textiles, shoes, wines as good as any of which France and Italy can boast and paper, but also sterner stuff like steel and internal combustion engines. More than that: the agriculture itself is being collectivised and modernised. The first post-war five year plan stipulated a capital investment programme of four thousand million roubles. Its fruits are to be seen in the new factories and power stations which are springing up all over Georgia.

However, spectacular as these developments have been in the economic sphere, they do not sum up the story of progress during the past three decades. Tractors and hydro-electric plants, though necessary to human well-being, do not constitute the ultimate measure of man's happiness or freedom. How has the Revolution affected the cultural and spiritual life of the Georgian people? That is a question which one is bound to ask one's Georgian friends.

There is a statistical answer to this question; and I was furnished some interesting figures by the Rector of the University at Tbilisi. Before the advent of the Soviets, there were not more than one hundred schools for the whole of Georgia. Today, not counting the four thousand primary schools, there are one thousand high schools. In 1921, there were no facilities for technical education and not a single university in Georgia. Today, the Georgian Republic has eight universities and institutions for advanced studies, not to mention such specialised institutes as the Pedagogical Institute, the Institute of Dramatic Art and the Academy of Art.

Tbilisi, the capital, has a magnificent university which, in addition to the Sciences and Humanities, is a centre for the special study of Linguistics, with particular emphasis on the languages of the Near East, which is as it

should be, since Georgia has been claimed to be the 'museum of languages.' Before the end of this year the University at Tbilisi will have a great new wing added to it, not only to provide room for the growing number of students, but also to house its vast library of a million books. In 1921, the rector told me, the biggest library in Tbilisi, belonging to a private gymnasium, had nine thousand books.

Until now, however, the limiting factor in the expansion of educational and other welfare facilities has been the shortage of trained personnel. Even Revolutions cannot produce teachers, doctors, and agronomists overnight, Stakhanovitism or no Stakhanovitism. But now Georgia, like many other republics of the Soviet Union, has reached a point where this limiting factor is no longer operative. Already in Georgia, there is one trained teacher for every three hundred persons, one doctor for every four hundred and one agricultural expert for every five hundred. These are figures which stand comparison with the best that even Scandinavian countries, which had such a lead, can furnish. By the time the second five-year plan is completed, there is little reason to doubt that Georgia will have become, from the point of view of its educational attainments, one of the most advanced regions in the world.

The statistical approach, however, gives us no adequate measure of the cultural renaissance of Georgia. One has to go to the theatre, to the opera and ballet, to the Conservatoire and art gallery to get an accurate idea of how the creative genius of the Georgian people has flowered. I can speak with knowledge only of Tbilisi. With its population of six hundred thousand, it has a cultural life which many a metropolis might envy. There are half a dozen theatres with a full and varied repertoire of modern and classical Georgian plays, operas and ballets as well as Russian and international classics. I noted, with some amusement, that the Georgian actors talk a little patronisingly about their Moscow and Leningrad colleagues. Where, they ask one, for instance, can one find an Othello more moving than Kharava or a

Figaro more entertaining than Amiranashvili, the Stalin prize laureate?

This is a friendly and fraternal controversy of the Soviet family of nations in which it would be quite indecent for an outsider to enter and take sides. But there is one point on which one can give one's views without reserve. And that is on the music of Paliashvili. Its exquisite melody, its lyricism, and its grace combine all that is best in the classical and folk tradition of Georgian music, providing a welcome contrast to those discordant noises which have come to be regarded as the fashionable idiom of musical modernity. I was not, unfortunately, able to see his new Opera-Ballet, *Daisi*, but I did go to his *Abasalom and Ateri*, an extravagantly romantic theme, which is magnificently sustained by Paliashvili's tender and passionate music.

What is true of music is true in varying degrees of the other arts of Georgia. Both in their painting and architecture (I found Georgian painting in some ways more interesting than the work I had seen in Moscow), the Georgians have achieved a very satisfying synthesis of the traditional and contemporary styles. The Stalinian formula of a culture, national in form and socialist in content, has worked out very successfully in Georgia: it has provided at once an antidote against narrow minded provincialism and sentimental revivalism, enabling the artists to achieve in their work a quality of universality without sacrificing the individual and particular elements of the aesthetic genius of the people.

In literature, especially in poetry, the post-revolutionary period has produced an abundant harvest of genius. Not only are many of the old poets, like Abasheli, Grishashvili, Shanshishvili and others still writing, having found new inspiration in the post-revolutionary developments, but a whole generation of younger poets has grown up and come to maturity since the Revolution. The works of Tabidze, Abashidze, Leonidze, Simon Chik'ovani, to mention only a few, reflect, of course, the thematics characteristic of the contemporary Soviet poetry. But there is in them a romantic strain, a heroic

quality which is distinctly national and links their poetry with the epic poetry of the golden age of Georgia.

It might even be claimed that the most important single factor in the modern Renaissance of Georgian culture has been the rediscovery by the Georgian people of the potentialities of their own language. Without that rediscovery they could not have found an outlet for their creative energy nor recreated for us the music of a country where, as Chik'ovani puts it, "the whir of eagle's wings blends with the wild deer's ringing cry." The Revolution, if it had done nothing else for the Georgians, would have amply justified itself by this one great act of justice — the restoration of a language to a people. But, in point of fact, it has done much more: it has created the preconditions for a new golden age of Georgia.

*Part II*

*INTERPRETATION AND INFORMATION*



## THE SOVIET PRESS

THE Soviet Press is one of the largest in the world. This fact is statistically demonstrable. There are today nearly nine thousand newspapers and periodicals in the U.S.S.R. with an aggregate circulation of something approaching forty million copies. The Soviet Press can also claim to be the most polyglot in the world. Newspapers and journals are published in more than sixty languages of the Union. Every nationality, every Republic, large or small, every autonomous district and area of the Soviet Union has its own language Press. Some of these newspapers have circulations running into millions per day, like *Pravda*, for example, which with its various editions in the main cities of the Soviet Union, sells nearly three million copies daily. There are others, however, which print no more than a few thousand copies.

How does the Soviet Press function? How is it organised? What are its peculiar features? These are questions which are of interest to every serious student of the Soviet system. For directly or indirectly, the Press of a country mirrors not only its social physiognomy, but also the outlook, the interests, even the passions and perversities of its people.

It should be admitted straightway that the Soviet Press differs radically from the Press anywhere else in its structure, its ownership, its organisation and the purpose it sets out to serve. Indeed, an observer coming to Russia from the West has the impression of having entered what might well be described as a journalistic Erewhon. In terms of Western conceptions, the news sense

and news values of the Soviet editors seem to be quite topsy-turvy. Items which are considered front-page copy by the popular Press of the West would not be touched by the Soviet editors even with a sterilised pair of tongs. The Soviet Press has no room, for instance, for social gossip, 'human-touch' stories, lives and loves of film stars, news of crime (with or without passion, unless, of course, it happens to be political crime, such as war-mongering), and strip cartoons. Journalists and columnists who specialise in these things will find it hard to earn a living in the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, the Soviet Press devotes an inordinately large amount of space to items which most Western editors would immediately relegate to the waste-paper basket, such as political developments in remote if populous countries, long inventories of figures dealing with the economic development of the Soviet Union, abstruse and involved discussion of theoretical, sociological questions.

The Soviet Press, in brief, sets out to be a vehicle of education rather than a branch of the entertainment industry. Whether one accepts its angle of interpretation or not, it would be hard to deny that it is a Press infinitely more serious in its approach and discriminating in its choice of news, coherent in the presentation of world developments, and guided by a more consistent sense of purpose than anything that one finds in the world outside the frontiers of the Soviet Union.

This fact must be attributed, partly at any rate, to the organic structure of the Soviet Press. For it is not a privately owned, profit making industry. It is a kind of public utility. All printing presses and stocks of paper and other machinery on which the fourth estate depends for its functioning are publicly owned. The Soviet law does not permit private individuals to publish and own newspapers just as it does not permit private ownership of the means of production and distribution. Only public bodies are authorised to run newspapers and periodicals. These include all the organisations which in their totality constitute the Soviet society — the

Communist Party, the Trades Unions, the Red Army, and the various academic, cultural, economic, social and political institutions. On the fundamentals of domestic as well as foreign policy, the newspapers and journals, at every level, speak with one voice. This inevitably leads, not only to a certain duplication, but even monotony of comment in the Soviet Press. Yet, outside the sphere of these fundamentals, the Soviet Press reflects considerable variations of interest, even shades and nuances of views.

Taking as illustration only the Moscow Press which I studied with some care for two months, it would be quite wrong to assume that it is all much of a muchness. On the contrary, it serves a variety of interests, and as such is noticeably what the French call *nuancé* in its reportage and commentaries.

*Pravda*, the Party organ, which is housed in one of the most modern buildings in Moscow and has an up-to-date press with 31 sectors capable of turning out a million and a half copies in less than five hours, is overtly agitational in its outlook; its approach to domestic as well as international problems is outspokenly Marxist; and it does not pull its punches in commenting on events.

In contrast to this, *Izvestia* is generally the very model of discretion hardly equalled even by the Printing House Square. Its reportage is usually brief and factual, its comment most reticent. I remember that even after the signature of the Sino-Soviet Pact and agreements, it behaved with a remarkable moderation and restraint. Its editorial confined itself largely to a paraphrase of the Treaty and the agreements, some observations of a very general nature, and successfully resisted the temptation to be witty at the expense of Mr. Dean Acheson's speculative excesses on the subject of Sino-Soviet relations. This reticence and moderation is understandable: *Izvestia* is the organ of the Soviet Government and the Soviet Government is by far the most taciturn Government in the modern world.

Then there is the *Trud*, the organ of the Soviet Trades Unions. It specialises in labour and trade union

news, internal as well as international. Similarly, the *Red Star* looks after the interests of the Soviet Armed Forces and devotes itself to a discussion of military and strategic developments. The Soviet writers have their own organ, the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, a bi-weekly with a very large circulation and influence. It publishes, apart from general political news and comment, short stories, critiques of books, articles on literary developments in the Soviet Union and in other countries. The *Evening Moscow* is the nearest approach to what in the West would be regarded as a popular newspaper: it publishes more local Moscow news than either *Pravda* or the *Izvestia* and relief is provided in the form of pictures, which rarely happens with the other two dailies.

The Soviet papers are not bulky as the American or even some of the Continental newspapers. They are smaller even than the British papers. It is not often that *Pravda* or the *Izvestia* have a six-page edition. Yet it would be true to say that the Soviet papers contain more news than most popular American or European newspapers. The paradox is easily explained. The Soviet Press does not go in for sensational headlines and display. It rigorously eschews triviality. Unlike even the Communist Press of Western Europe, it does not waste pages on sports news, tips on horse-racing, columns of football pools, accounts of passionate pugilistics. Moreover, it is under no compulsion to record the play of "bulls" and "bears", the ebb and flow of the mysterious world of high finance, prophecies on the trend of stock markets, quotation of commodity prices. Finally, it confines itself to news and views and does not set out to be a medium for commercial advertising. The economy in space thus effected is quite astonishing. A four page issue of *Pravda* is able actually to give its readers on the average as many, if not more, column inches of news as a ten page issue of *The Times*, or even a twelve page edition of *Le Monde*.

It is true that news of internal developments predominates in the Soviet Press. The Soviet Union is a very big country, a fact which is often overlooked. It is not

only a very big country, but very big things are happening there every day even if they are not the kind of things which attract the attention of the international Press. The Soviet readers are naturally intensely and keenly interested in these big things. I say naturally, because the Soviet people themselves are doing these things. But with this interest in domestic developments, the Soviet Press does manage to combine a very comprehensive, if selective, reportage of international events. The angle is inevitably the Soviet angle (just as the British Press as inevitably gives the British angle). But I found the Soviet Press better informed on world issues than many of the more serious organs in the West which enjoy a reputation, not always justified by their performance, of being well informed. This is particularly the case where Asian and African developments are concerned.

The picture of the Soviet public being cut off from world news which the anti-Soviet propagandists try to build up with such loving care, does not correspond to any sort of reality. It must be added, however, that the reportage of international events which one finds in the Soviet Press differs from that of the Western Press. It deals more with economic and social urgencies rather than personalities; with what people do rather than what they say; with the fate of the disinherited of the earth rather than the doings of those who have wealth and power. Thus it often happens that speeches of self-important world statesmen go unreported in the Soviet Press while a peasant struggle on the coast of Coromandel or a labour strike in Peru and Patagonia would find mention. The Soviet Press, of course, is not infallible. It can and does make mistakes, but on the whole these mistakes are in minor matters of detail rather than in the interpretation of the basic dynamics of current history. And time is working for the Soviet Press. For what it regards as news today will come to be regarded as news tomorrow even by the people in the West.

But what of the freedom of the Press in the Soviet.

Union? The question is important, though freedom is a term which is becoming more and more equivocal in its meaning since it is being invoked by all sorts of people and for all sorts of reasons. When the Press lords, for instance, talk of the freedom of the Press, it is obvious that they are not concerned about anything else but their own freedom to control public opinion. In this matter, as well as all other fundamental questions, the Russians are more honest. They admit that their Press has to work within certain limits, that there are certain types of freedom which it does not enjoy. It is not, for instance, free to advocate the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. It is not free to preach racial and national hatreds or war as an instrument of policy. And, as far as I know, it is not free to criticise Stalin or Molotov personally. But apart from these wholesome restrictions, it does enjoy every other freedom. It is a fact that if one were to read the Soviet papers for the past few years, one would find that every Soviet minister has at one time or another come in for criticism. It can and does criticise, often in the severest terms, bureaucrats, inefficient departments, and even members of the Politbureau.

Indeed, it is significant that most professional anti-Soviet critics depend for their ammunition on the Soviet Press which they carefully comb out for items which might be useful in substantiating their particular theses. So much so, that Gorky at one time seriously suggested to Stalin that the Soviet Press should be more moderate in its criticism in order not to give a handle to the anti-Soviets, to which Stalin, in a famous letter, characteristically replied that without self-criticism the Soviet Union could not develop on healthy lines.

If it is true that the Soviet Press functions within a certain self-imposed political and moral discipline, it is also true that in other directions it enjoys greater freedom than its Western counterpart. The Soviet Press, to mention only the more obvious forms of compulsions to which the Press outside the Soviet Union is normally subject, is not troubled by the invisible censorship exer-

cised by the advertisers.

Soviet journalists do not have to guard themselves against any indiscrete phrase which might annoy the shareholders and the directors of the great newspaper trusts which control the Press in the capitalist countries. And, incredible though it may sound, it is nevertheless a fact that even in *Pravda*, which one might reasonably expect to be the very perfection of political rectitude, there is no censorship of the copy before publication.

On the balance, therefore, one will have to be very innocent or very perverse to believe that the advantage in regard to this question of freedom lies with the capitalist Press. A working political journalist might even be tempted at times to envy the latitude permitted by the Soviet editors to their political commentators.

## SOVIET EDUCATION

A VISITOR to the Soviet Union who asked to see the 'progressive' schools and educational institutions in the country would almost certainly be met with polite incredulity on the part of his Russian friends. And for understandable reasons. To qualify some schools as 'progressive' is to imply that there must be others which are less progressive or even unprogressive. Such an anti-thesis makes no sense to the Soviet people.

In the Soviet Union there are not two different types of educational institutions, one for the children of the well-to-do and discerning and the other for the children of the common people. The system of education throughout the Union from Leningrad to Vladivostok, from Tashkent to Murmansk, is identical in all essentials.

There is no question that this system is intimately related to the basic ethos of a socialist society and that it can work effectively only within the framework of such a social system. The Russian educationists do not make any secret of the fact that they look upon education as a means to an end — the end being the upbringing of children in such a way as to equip them to become useful citizens of a society based on common ownership of the means of production.

However, the pedagogical methods followed by the Soviets and their general approach to educational problems have, up to a point, an intrinsic interest quite independent of the social philosophy of the Soviet state and deserve the attention of even those who are unable to accept the economic doctrines of Socialism and Communism. This is so because the Soviet educational ideas are

broadly in line with advanced educational ideas and methods in other parts of the world. But with this difference, it must be added, that while outside the Soviet Union the application of these ideas is sporadic and fitful, in the U.S.S.R. they are being applied systematically and universally.

The fundamental axioms of the Soviet educational system are challengingly simple. So simple, indeed, that they are likely to come as a surprise to many who probably entertain the notion that the Soviet schools are nothing more than incubators designed to hatch young Communists. The first axiom is that the school is not a superior type of hatchery of the kind described in *Brave New World* for turning out efficient cogs to fit into the Soviet machine. It must, therefore, study the individuality of each child and aim at developing his or her special talents and aptitudes.

The second axiom is that the school should be a place of happiness and not a purgatorial institution where children go to perform the early stages of their penance for the mortal sin of having been born on this planet.

The third axiom is that education should aim at being comprehensive, that is, it should combine academic training with the practical; moral development with the physical; intellectual with the imaginative; and, in brief, ensure the harmonious evolution of human personality.

These axioms were formulated for my benefit by the Headmaster of the Tolstoy School at Yasnaya Polyana who claimed that the Soviet Union has succeeded in realising the ideals of education which Tolstoy had formulated. Demonstrably, these axioms are such that they cannot but be approved by all sane educationists anywhere. But it is one thing to formulate attractive and amiable abstract principles, another to translate them into practice. The striking as well as the significant thing about the Soviet system of education is that theory and practice here do really achieve approximation. Even the foreign colony in the Soviet capital, most of whose members can find no good word for anything else in the country, would be willing grudgingly to admit that the

Soviets at least look after the youth of the country well and spare neither money nor effort for this purpose.

That is negative testimony, but it is important; the more important, perhaps, precisely because it is negative. To it I must add the positive evidence and verification I was able to obtain myself. I had opportunity to see some of the schools, from the kindergarten to the secondary stage; and not only in Moscow but in far off Georgia. These schools, it is true, did not impress one by the lavishness of their furnishings. The Soviet people, I have noted again and again, are not interested in and not impressed by the externals. But these schools did impress one by their general atmosphere which confirmed the claim of Soviet educationists that schools in the Soviet Union are not penitentiaries but institutions meant to bring happiness to children. I found the boys and girls not only physically healthy, but relatively much more intellectually alert and developed than boys and girls of corresponding ages in the West. Their knowledge of world affairs would do credit to many a world statesman. Certainly, the questions they asked one had a definite bias, but they at least showed a lively interest in international problems and the fate of humanity.

An interesting feature of the Soviet schools is the systematic attempt to associate young students with the management of the school. School committees in which not only the teachers and parents participate, but also the students, are a regular feature of the working of secondary schools. There is nothing corresponding to the prefectorial system of the British public school with its underlying hierarchical social conceptions.

In the maintenance of school discipline, youth organisations like the Pioneers and Komsomols play a very important role. I say important, because the Soviet educationists have definitely, unequivocally, and irrevocably abjured the rod as the instrument of discipline. Stalin, when he asked Lady Astor about the beating of children in schools in England in the course of a famous interview, was not just being awkward. He was laying his

finger on a vital point of difference between the Soviet schools and schools outside the Soviet Union. For it is a fact that corporal punishment, and, indeed, punishment as such, is forbidden in Soviet schools. The only form of correction permitted is persuasion.

I had a very touching verification of this in a quite unexpected place — at the Central Children's Theatre in Moscow. It came during the performance of a play on the theme of racialism in the United States. There is an episode in the play where a Negro boy, ironically called 'Snowflake' who is the central character, is caned for the heinous crime of having inadvertently touched a white girl. The episode, as indeed the whole play, is obviously intended to be propaganda against theories of racialism. But that is not the only point of interest about the play. What was even more interesting to watch was the involuntary and unrehearsed reaction of the audience, most of them children with ages ranging between five and fourteen. This particular incident evoked a spontaneous cry of horror from the whole auditorium. It was clear to me that this was not merely a question of the audience feeling a sense of identification with the character in the play, but that the idea of a child being subjected to corporal punishment in cold blood by an adult teacher was something utterly alien to the experience of the children in the audience.

Personally, I have no doubt that the humane treatment of children in the Soviet schools is one of the main, if not the only, reasons which accounts for the fact that juvenile delinquency and violence has never assumed anything like the serious proportions which it has in the West especially during the war and post-war years; and that, despite the immensely greater havoc of war, the Soviet Union has not been faced with the problem of dead-end kids which has been proving so intractable for the welfare workers and educational authorities in the cities of the West.

On the academic side, the standard of education is impressively high in Soviet schools, and teaching techniques often very imaginative and original. This is

especially true in regard to the teaching of scientific and technical subjects. For one thing, Soviet schools make much more systematic use of visual media as vehicles of education. I observed, for example, that the various departments and faculties in secondary schools were equipped not only with special libraries of books dealing with their subjects, but also good libraries of films and apparatus for showing these films. This undoubtedly makes the teaching of Sciences much easier; and I must record that the level of technical knowledge of the boys and girls in Soviet schools is considerably higher than anything I have seen in the West, though boastful claims to the contrary are made by Westerners. In the Palace of the Pioneers in Tbilisi, for example, I found boys of twelve and fourteen years of age sufficiently advanced in aeronautics to be able not only to make toy aeroplanes, but working models of aero-engines. This is a sphere where the Government of the newly liberated countries of Asia, if they are really serious about the technical training of their people, will be well advised to study the Soviet methods carefully and with some sense of humility, whatever their objections to the Soviet system.

I discussed the question of co-education with some of the Soviet teachers, though not at sufficient length to be able to talk about it with any authority. But briefly the position is something like this. The original Soviet attempt at co-education at every level, it would appear, was partly meant to be an experiment and partly was dictated by necessity: the shortage of teaching staff. The last factor is still operative in some areas and in the countryside, with the result that co-education is still practised in rural areas both in the primary and secondary stages.

In the towns and cities, however, there are separate schools for boys and girls at the secondary stage. The Soviet educationists explain that as a result of their experience they have found that there is a definite variation of development in the two sexes between the ages of seven to fourteen which makes co-education difficult

and impracticable. Also, they add, that girls during these years have to receive training in certain special subjects which complicates the working of co-educational schools and involves waste of time. But the issue of co-education is still a matter for lively discussion, even controversy, among the Soviet educationists and no final conclusions have yet been reached. We are still in a period of experiment and all theories and generalisations are bound to undergo modification as a result of practice and experience.

At this stage it is, perhaps, pertinent also to discuss the fundamental ideas guiding the Soviet approach to education. Broadly, these are two. The first is that education is not merely a passive process by which information on a certain number of subjects is mechanically pumped into the heads of the pupils. It should aim at being an active process of assimilation of knowledge by the growing child, at developing the intellectual curiosity and imaginative initiative of the children. To achieve this end the Soviet schools encourage the idea of research at a very early stage through the formation of special study and research groups run entirely by the students. The second and even more vital principle of the Soviet educational system is that the school must not become an ivory tower, insulated and isolated from the life of the people, but must establish a close and practical relationship between the students and the social framework into which they have to fit when they leave school.

To do this the Soviet educational authorities try to bring boys and girls into contact with the civic, productive and cultural life of the country from a very early age. All the kindergartens in the cities, for example, have their own *dachas* in the country where the children go during the summer holidays and learn about life in the countryside. The pupils at a school I visited were carrying out some Michurinian experiments on a farm. The girls from the orphanage at *Yasnaya Polyana*, I learned, had, as part of the programme for the term, visited a coal mine so as to learn about the life and work of the miners. And during the recent elections to the

Supreme Soviet every school was also an *Agitpoint*, and the pupils took active part in helping to organise electoral activity. By means of this continuous and systematic association of children and youths with the activities of the adult world, some of the psychological and practical difficulties of transition from childhood and adolescence to adult life would be obviated.

Soviet education is a subject worthy of serious and prolonged study. Here it is possible only to give a brief and sketchy idea of some of its salient features. Even a superficial impression like the present, however, is enough to convince one that it is informed throughout by a very humane and rational outlook. Indeed, its effectiveness, which has been amply demonstrated during the past three decades, derives from its underlying rationalism and humanity. It is certain that when the dust of the imbecile controversies engendered by the Cold War has cleared, the achievements of the Soviet Union in the sphere of education will be recognised as one of her most momentous contributions to the cause of human progress.

## THE HOUSE WITH THE OPEN DOOR

OBVIOUSLY, the title of this chapter needs explanation. It suggested itself to me during a visit to Berlin almost three years ago. The capital of the fallen Reich was then a nightmare city of dreadful nights and dreadful days, of appalling physical misery and even greater spiritual desolation. Those were, for Berliners, the days of contempt. Fraternisation in the Western sectors of the city had not progressed even as far as the holding of charity bazaars by the wives of the Western Generals to help the aged, the sick and the needy among the Herrenvolk in their extremity.

On the streets, love, of course, was the cheapest and most abundant commodity, priced no more than a packet of Camel cigarettes or a bar of Nestle's chocolate. But, incongruously, to bring a German friend, male or female, into the allied hostelries was frowned upon by the champions of the Western way of life. There was no question yet of opening subscription lists for the defence and upkeep of war criminals. True, ex-Nazis were already being discretely recruited for expert services in Indo-China and Greece. But even Mr. Churchill, for Fulton and all that, had not yet boldly called for the honourable comradeship of Germans in the defence of the West against "Asiatic" Bolshevism. Germans, in his racy vocabulary, were still "Huns", good only when they were "dead."

It was in this fallen Babylon, this desert of Western civilisation, that I chanced upon what seemed to be an oasis of human decency. Situated not far from Hitler's Chancellory in a pleasant and elegant building which used

to be part of the Ministry of Finance under the Third Reich, it was called the House of Soviet Culture. The Germans, I learned, called it by a different name. They called it "The House with the Open Door." Appropriately enough: for the doors of this institution were open to everybody, victor and vanquished, the rich and the poor alike. Here one could see highranking Red Army officers sitting in the small cinema hall or the picture gallery next to German charwomen and dustmen. No permit was needed to enter the place, which apart from the cinema and the picture gallery, had a reading room, a lecture hall and a bar.

That it was Soviet propaganda was obvious. But that fact did not minimise its significance — it even heightened it. For the propaganda of a country always partakes of the intentions and ideals which that country cherishes, though the relationship may be indirect. Thus it seemed to me that if the Soviets wanted their House of Culture to be known as the "House with the Open Door", it might well be that that was their attitude to culture. But I cautiously restrained myself from jumping to any far-reaching and final conclusions. After all, nations as well as individuals are in the habit of putting on masks for special occasions, and what may seem politic to the Russians in Berlin may not seem so in Moscow. Before developing the theme, therefore, I wanted to have further verification on the spot.

I have not lived long enough in the Soviet Union to speak with authority on every aspect of contemporary Soviet culture, but there is one thing that I can say about it without fear of contradiction. And that is this: in the Soviet Union today there are not two different levels of cultural life, one at which the élite live and the other which is that of the common people. The antithesis between mass civilisation and minority culture which Dr. Leavis established during the inter-war years, and which is still valid for the Western world on both sides of the Atlantic, is not operative in the U.S.S.R.

Whatever culture there is, is accessible to everybody. The strength as well as the defects of Soviet culture

derive from its universality. But the strength, it must be said, is fundamental; defects, incidental. For if it is true that the contemporary Soviet culture has not yet acquired all the refined graces, it is also true that by making cultural facilities available to the whole population, the Soviet Union has released the creative potential of the people at every level.

It is not only metaphorically that Soviet culture can be described as the "House with the Open Door": it is so in reality. This fact is being constantly brought home to one in Russia. I learned with some surprise, for instance, that the great Lenin Library, today the second largest in the world, is open from nine in the morning till midnight. At the British Museum in London, on the other hand, the closing bell begins to ring with an irritating imperativeness soon after 4-30 in the afternoon. A mere matter of national habits? Possibly, but it also signifies something more. Research work in England is the prerogative of specialists or those who have leisure and independent means: it is for these that the British Museum largely caters. On the other hand, the Lenin Library has to think of workers in the factories of Moscow who, after their working shift, may want to do research.

Or one can take the example of the Soviet Theatre. Comparisons are invidious, but they are in this case inevitable. No gallup poll or mass observation survey has been conducted on this subject. But it would be a conservative estimate to suggest that probably three-fourths of the population of Great Britain has never visited anything more edifying than a Music Hall, has never seen a Shakespeare play being performed. But in the Soviet Union it would be difficult to find anybody who does not go to a theatre at least once a month. Even the smallest kolkhoz aspires to have an amateur dramatic society of its own and so far as Shakespeare is concerned he is undoubtedly better known in Russia than within a twenty-miles radius of even Stratford on Avon.

True, during the war years and since, attempts have been made in the West, too, to popularise culture, but

these attempts still savour of middle class revivalism and have barely touched the fringe of the problem. In the Soviet Union, however, there is no self-consciousness about this mass diffusion of culture. On the contrary, people demand culture as their inalienable right.

For a writer from the outside world, the most impressive thing is the hunger of the Soviet people for books, a hunger which even the over-worked printing presses of the Soviet Union cannot satisfy. The crowds in the bookshops have to be seen to be believed. Most books are sold out within a week of publication. It is always a case of too many readers chasing too few books, while in the West the reverse is nearer the truth. And yet books in the Soviet Union are published in very large editions which would make Western publishers green with envy. Even for works on comparatively abstruse subjects, the smallest edition is ten thousand copies.

The quantitative expansion of cultural facilities since the Revolution has been enormous. But what of the quality of the new culture that the Soviets have created? The kind of imbecile pulp literature which has the largest circulation in the West would find no market in the Soviet Union. The 'Readers Digest' mentality is conspicuous by its absence; there are no tales of violence and detection selling by the millions. As a Russian friend put it, the Soviet people have no use for literary refuse.

Whatever else may or may not be true of the contemporary Russian reading public, it is undeniable that it has a serious attitude to life and it expects the same seriousness and purposiveness from writers. This by itself is, of course, sufficient to damn Soviet literature in the eyes of Western critics. For them, any moral pre-occupation, any positive attitude to human problems, any expression of optimism about human beings represents an unpardonable departure from the true norms of refinement. The significant for them must always be the negative or, at least, neurotic. And this is perfectly understandable: the negative is the ambient mood of the West and writers share this collective neurosis.

But the present mood in the Soviet Union is not one of negation or despondency: it is one of contagious confidence in human destiny. It is possible to argue that this exuberant optimism about the human situation might be an over-simplification of the issues, but the point is that it corresponds with the basic experience of the Soviet people who, in face of almost heart-breaking difficulties, have succeeded in laying the foundations of a new society and civilisation. It is always easier for people to believe in a heroic attitude if they have actual experience of heroic deeds. This explains the enormous popularity of novels such as Azhayev's *Far From Moscow*, Fadeyev's *The Young Guard* and Bubennov's *The White Birch*. They are informed throughout by the new working class heroism which has made possible the consolidation of Soviet power.

At this point it is necessary to raise certain wider questions connected with the Soviet view of art and culture. For today it is no longer only differences of economic, political and social doctrines which divide the Soviet world from the West. The gulf is even wider when we come to the sphere of aesthetics. Indeed, the Soviet approach to art evokes, if anything, a somewhat more vehemently hostile reaction among the Western intelligentsia than the social and politico-economic ideas of the Soviets. This is hardly surprising. During the early stages of Soviet development, Soviet writers and artists had not yet had time fully to define their ideas with any degree of precision and coherence. Some of these ideas, in fact, trailed clouds of confusion from the past; they were transitional and as such reflected a duality of approach, an ambivalence of outlook resulting from the inevitable time-lag between the changes in the economic foundations of a society and changes in the superstructure. But the period of transition is now over. The post-war years have witnessed a very sharp affirmation of

the Soviet views on cultural matters and the aesthetic controversy between the East and the West has, as a result, acquired a more acute character.

What are the issues at stake in this controversy? The question is not easy to answer, especially as the aesthetic controversy has become hopelessly entangled in the morbid polemics of the Cold War. Yet it is essential to disentangle the purely polemical from the basic elements of the controversy. For the controversy is of capital importance: it touches the fundamental problem of values and cannot, therefore, be dismissed as irrelevant. To tackle the problem it is necessary, in the first place, to find out exactly what the Soviet critics define as the function of art. It is quite impossible in this matter to rely upon brief quotations from the Soviet Press which find their way into the Western Press. These quotations are almost invariably taken out of their context and distorted with the deliberate purpose of confusing the issues and preventing a true appreciation of the Soviet point of view.

I had opportunity to discuss these questions with the Soviet writers at some length and must record that, whether one accepts them wholly or not, their views on art have undeniable consistency, certainly greater consistency than the views of their detractors. Negatively, they reject the concept of 'art for art's sake.' Unlike Flaubert who advised the artist to retreat "into the ivory tower alone with his dreams, like a bayadere in the incense-laden temple", they hold with Belinsky that the ivory tower is a convenient, but perverse myth created by those who refuse to face their social responsibilities and want to make art merely "a source of sybaritic titillation, the plaything of indolent loungers."

There is no art, they insist, which transcends social realities and social loyalties. The very act of a writer or artist turning his back on the social realities of his time, they maintain, is an act of identification with the existing social relations based on exploitation of man by man, passive defence of the *status quo*, and consequently betrayal of those progressive forces struggling to change

and refashion life in the forward movement of time.

Positively, they argue, art and literature must have a purpose, not in a narrowly didactic sense, but in the larger social sense. They accept wholeheartedly Gorky's formulation that the writer and artist should not only criticise the old way of life and expose "the infectiousness of its vices," but "study, shape, depict and thereby assert the new way of life." In the context of the contemporary social realities, this means that art and literature must serve the cause of social revolution. For, as Lenin pointed out, art and literature cannot be "a private affair independent of the cause of the proletariat."

It is against the background of these very passionately held and cogently argued views that one has to see the Soviet critique of cosmopolitanism and formalism which has received so much publicity outside the Soviet Union and provided the narcissitic Western intellectuals at once an occasion for superior levity and self-righteous indignation. The view held among the fashionable Western critics is that the Soviet critique of cosmopolitanism and formalism is yet one more proof of absence of 'freedom' for the artist in the Soviet Union, of Russia's retreat from the true ideals of 'internationalism' into isolationist 'nationalism', even of her intentions to revive the 'greater Russian chauvinism.'

These charges, if true, would have very serious implications. But before pronouncing any judgement on these issues one must be very careful to determine with some precision whether these charges, like so many others, can be substantiated by any objective investigation or whether they are not merely a weapon of the demagogy (conscious or unconscious) of the Cold War, the reflex, so to speak, on the intellectual plane of the policy of *cordon sanitaire*. My own conclusions are as follows.

The first conclusion is that in criticising literary and aesthetic cosmopolitanism and formalism, the Soviet

writers are not resorting to a vague and generalised anathema which can mean anything or nothing; or to the convenient device, if one may so put it, of giving certain literary dogs a bad name in order to hang them. On the contrary, their critique is aimed at something very definite and specific. For example, they look upon formalism, not as the heroic search of the pure artist for an ideal of absolute perfection, but as an alibi for mental and spiritual vacuity, an attempt on the part of those who have nothing to say to camouflage the absence of content behind a pyrotechnics of formal experiments, or rather, to be more precise, formal posturings.

They acknowledge the right of the artist to experiment, to explore the unexplored regions of the human soul. But they reject the idea of experiment for the sake of experiment, of experiment which instead of expanding human awareness has the effect of narrowing it to the pin-point universe of personal obsessions. Their argument is that in all great art, form is something that is so profoundly a part of the content that one is not aware of it as having an independent signification. When the manner of a writer, they suggest, becomes self-conscious mannerism, it usually implies that the creative impulse has been exhausted or stultified. They interpret the various literary and aesthetic cults which have been fashionable in the West during the past half a century — from Symbolism down to Existentialism — as the products of minds which cannot liberate themselves from the prison-house of a dying cultural tradition bound up with the dying bourgeois social order.

On the question of cosmopolitanism, the position of the Soviet writers is even more precise and, in my view, unchallengeable. It was explained to me by the talented poet Surkov who edits the popular Moscow weekly *Oganyik*. Cosmopolitanism, he argued, is not regarded by the Soviet intelligentsia as the literary and aesthetic correlative of internationalism. The two things, he insisted, are quite distinct, even antithetical. True internationalism does not deny the national. Indeed, literature

and art achieve their optimum significance at the point at which they achieve closest contact with the life of a people, with distinctive cultural and national traditions. "For each people," Surkov added with that simplicity of formulation which is so characteristic of modern Russian intelligentsia, "has its own face; and all great literature, all great art reflects the face of the people from whom it derives."

Cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, distorts or even destroys the 'face' of a people. It takes the writers and artists out of their natural, national environment. It destroys the link between the creative artist and the people to whom he or she belongs. Instead of developing the language, the forms, the traditions integral to the genius of a people, it seeks to set up an artificial language, a counterfeit aesthetic idiom, a kind of cultural Esperanto. It thus severs the artist from the essential and healthy sources of inspiration and creation, from the roots through which alone he can derive sustenance.

Cosmopolitanism, in other words, is the refuge of the irresponsible and the rootless. It is the philosophy of rootlessness and social irresponsibility; and it is natural that it should become popular in the period of disintegration and decay of bourgeois society. For in this period writers and artists, when they are not actually helping the struggle of their people for a new social order, become mere flotsam and jetsam in the tide of decay; people without purpose and function who compensate themselves for this want by building up an inflated myth of their personal importance.

Comrade Surkov did not leave the argument at this. He developed it further. He maintained that cosmopolitanism is not just an innocent literary or aesthetic escapade of the dwellers in the ivory tower. It might have been that in the past, but in the particular phase of history through which we are living it has become something quite different, something recognisably pernicious. The fastidious dwellers in the ivory tower, the internationally minded "cosmopolites", the purists of the Parnassus who will not soil their hands by touching

anything political, are not so fastidious, not so liberal, not so neutral or detached when it comes to taking a position against the Soviet Union, or the Peoples' Democracies, or against the revolutionary movements of the colonial peoples. On these issues, they can be as violent and hysterical partisans as the most vulgar and ostentatious yahoo and jingo.

And it is natural that it should be so. For cosmopolitanism is today a tool in the hands of international reaction and imperialism. It is the answer of international capitalism to the internationalism and solidarity of the working class movement. While working-class and democratic internationalism is based on mutual respect for each other's cultural traditions, on equality of all peoples, cosmopolitanism is calculated to destroy men's love for their fatherlands and to make them rootless. And for the excellent reason that people have to be divorced from their loyalty to their fatherland before they can be enslaved; they have to be made rootless before they can be turned into spiritual mercenaries and soldiers of fortune. Hence it is that the export and import of capitalism develops parallel with the export and import of cosmopolitanism. In the existing world situation, Surkov went on to affirm, cosmopolitanism serves as the cultural bulldozer of American Imperialism seeking world hegemony. The Soviet Union has no use for it.

His answer to the Western charge of Russian chauvinism was brief but pointed. The U.S.S.R. itself is the best and most concrete symbol of internationalism, of co-operation between different peoples on a basis of complete equality. The policy on the question of nationalities formulated by Stalin, explicitly lays down that every people have the right to their own culture and language in the Socialist society. There are no great or small nations inside the Soviet Union: all nations enjoy the same rights. The Russians, for example, number over fifty million. On the other hand the Avartzi of Dagastan count no more than a few thousand. Yet they have their own distinctive culture and their own language which is part of the cultural wealth of the U.S.S.R., as precious as the

contribution of the Russians. And that, he went on, is not all. The peoples of the Soviet Union are fully aware of their fraternal relationship to the human family. They want to gather all that is most vital, living and progressive in world literature and culture.

That is why even during the past few years thirty million copies of world classics and contemporary literary and scientific writings of all lands have been printed in Russian alone. Can America or Great Britain equal this record? It is well known that there is an unofficial ban on the publication of Soviet literature in many countries in the West and there are countries where even the possession of Soviet books is considered a crime. "We Russians," Surkov concluded, "like to have our own 'face', and we like other nations to have theirs, for each has its own unique beauty."

I have reproduced, or rather paraphrased, Comrade Surkov's arguments as accurately as possible and more or less fully because they are at once authoritative and representative. A dispassionate examination of these arguments, which are demonstrably challenging and may well, in some cases, be highly debatable, would undoubtedly reveal a certain polemical strain, even an assertiveness, which can directly be related to the present East-West tension. But, and this is important to stress, the polemical element merely determines the points of emphasis — even over-emphasis, if one likes to be critical. The fundamental argument goes beyond polemics. It is integral to the Marxist world outlook and especially to the Marxist view of the relationship between art and literature and society.

This may be elaborating the obvious, but the point has to be made. For the Soviet formulations on the cultural issues are presented in the West with that outraged air of surprise which would suggest to the unwary that these formulations are the product of some deranged

mind or the illiterate outpourings of some wayward member of the Politbureau. In point of fact, as any serious analysis of Surkov's arguments would show, they are the logical development in the application of the Marxist method of analysis to literary and aesthetic phenomena. What is of even greater interest is that these formulations on art have not suddenly emerged from the head of Stalin or Zhadanov nor are they the outcome of an arbitrary bureaucratic decision. During the past ten years or more there has been continuous and systematic discussion in the Soviet literary and aesthetic circles of these problems. And not only in literary and aesthetic circles. For there is a far more active relationship between the artist and his public in the Soviet Union than in the West; and the Soviet public has fully participated in these discussions and has made it perfectly clear what it expects of artists. It is only as a result of these prolonged and multilateral discussions that certain generalisations have been formulated on the cultural issues.

Another point that must be made is that these formulations are by no means as startlingly unorthodox, even by Western standards, as they are made out to be. After all, there has been, at least since the end of the 18th century, a powerful school of thought in Europe which has expected art and literature to be on the side of the angels, to have a definite social function, and to aim at intelligibility not only at the level of the initiates but the laity. One has only to invoke the critical ideas of Blake, of Ruskin, of William Morris, not to mention the earlier Wordsworth in this context, to see that the contemporary Russian critics have only developed a stage further the conceptions which have a fairly respectable lineage.

It is significant that the Soviet writers claim that their critique of cosmopolitanism and formalism has historical continuity with the ideas of reputable progressive critics of the pre-revolutionary epoch, of men like Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Plekhanov, Lunacharsky, Tolstoy and Gorky. This is a claim which cannot be contested by anybody acquainted with the critical theories developed by the progressive school of writers

and critics who dominated the scene in pre-revolutionary Russia. For it was not Zhadanov, but Belinsky, for instance, who, in dealing with the concept of art for art's sake, wrote: "There never was such an art anywhere... In our time more than ever before, art and literature have become vehicles giving expression to social issues. To deny art the right to serve the public interest means to degrade, not exalt it, inasmuch as this is tantamount to robbing it of the most vital of forces, namely, thought..." No condemnation of the 'Ivory Tower' school of artists could be more explicit.

The final deduction, therefore, is that the present trends in Soviet criticism are not just a passing phase, a transient and violent reaction to the Western Cold War on the ideological and aesthetic fronts, but represent the natural development and amplification of the progressive trends of the past hundred and fifty years, and as such, integral to the Marxist world-view.

That many of these formulations will need further discussion, possibly even revision and modification, is quite possible. But the central thesis is not likely to be modified and the essence of that thesis is that the function of art and literature is not, as Wilde would have it, to tell an elegant lie, but the presentation of truth — truth, that is, conceived not as something abstract, static and unchanging, but as a process, as the dynamics of history itself.

The real issue in discussing the Soviet approach to culture is not the question of freedom or lack of freedom for the artist and the writer. In any age and in any country artists and writers function within certain limitations and compulsions and they enjoy certain latitudes. These limitations and compulsions as well as freedoms are ultimately determined by the nature of the social organisation and the ends which that organisation serves. This is true of art and literature in the Soviet Union and

outside the Soviet Union. Only the limitations and compulsions as well as the freedoms vary because the Soviet social organism is working towards one kind of objective and the bourgeois social organism towards quite a different kind of objective. The choice which a writer or artist has to make is not between a hypothetical freedom or lack of it, but on this fundamental question of social objectives. There is no room for doubt that an overwhelming majority of the writers and artists in the Soviet Union feel that the choice they have made has been made freely, consciously and with full awareness of its implications.

The real issue in discussing the cultural situation in the Soviet Union is, therefore, quite different. The real issue is whether or not the Soviet formulations on art and literature have worked out well in practice. For in aesthetics, no less than in other spheres of human endeavour, the ultimate test of validity of any theory is the practice that flows from it. How far do the contemporary Soviet arts fulfil the purposes which they have set themselves?

In answering this question we have to bear in mind two things. The first is the time factor. After all, the Soviet society has only thirty years of existence behind it. These thirty years, moreover, have been a period of enormous strain when the tasks of creating the material basis of Socialism have demanded the utmost concentration of energy of the Soviet people on these specific tasks. There has not been time to work out the application of general ideas on culture to the concrete problems of aesthetic and literary forms. Critics of Soviet art who expect the perfection of form which the bourgeois art took centuries to realise are being deliberately unfair.

Secondly, it would be absurd to expect uniform results in every sphere of art from the application of these general principles. The situation in the various representational arts of the Soviet Union today is, in fact, not identical. I found Soviet painting, on the whole, somewhat disappointing. One has the impression that the Soviet painters in their reaction to the formalistic cults of the West have, perhaps, gone too far in the other

direction — in the direction of an almost stereoscopic naturalism so well illustrated in a picture like the *Toast of the People*. They tend to be illustrative and often photographic in their approach to a pictorial problem: and though it would be a mistake to minimise the importance of the purely illustrative art, art has to go beyond illustration to achieve permanence of significance. The Soviet critics are not unaware of this deficiency in contemporary Soviet paintings. As Comrade Surkov put it to me succinctly: "Do not think that our weaknesses are our programme."

Having made this critical observation, I must dissociate myself from those Western critics who find contemporary Soviet painting intolerable because the subjects and motifs which the Soviet painters regard worthy of their brush outrage their neurasthenic sensibilities. For me, on the contrary, the greatest virtue of the modern Russian painting is precisely the fact that it has discovered a whole new world of themes and motifs, even if it has yet to discover a mode of expression adequate to these themes and motifs. Furthermore, and quite apart from its value as an art illustrative of the present heroic phase of Soviet life, it has restored the human form as the principal focus of pictorial interest just as did the painters of the 15th and 16th century after breaking away from the stultifying tradition of Byzantine formalism.

The position with regard to sculpture is much more encouraging. One could even claim that the Soviet Union is today about the only country in the world where a new tradition of monumental art is being worked out. True, in the U.S.S.R. as elsewhere the interest of a good deal of civic statuary is sentimental rather than aesthetic. However, it is astonishing how much of the civic sculpture has an intrinsic artistic merit. Indeed, in the Soviet Union the sculptor has come into his own; has rediscovered his function for the first time since the Renaissance; and found subjects related to the life of his epoch worthy of representation in a three-dimensional medium. Some delightful examples of this can be seen in the Moscow Metro which itself is more than a public

utility and can justly be described as a work of imagination, in its own way as significant and beautiful as the Parthenon.

One of the most interesting developments in the field of Soviet sculpture is the increasing use of bas-relief in a variety of media. At the Sverdlov Station, for example, there are some exquisite ceramics representing all the national types, men and women, of the Soviet Union. At the Dynamo Station one sees reliefs of the various types of athletes. The new station at Taganskaya has panels representing all the armed forces of the Soviet Union in majolica harmonies of white and gold and azure. And last, but most beautiful of them all, are the sixteen bas-reliefs executed by the sculptor E. Ianson-Manizer on the theme of the "Labour of the Peoples of the U.S.S.R." at the Serpoukhovskaya Station. Without aiming at cleverness, self-conscious originality, or exhibitionist subtlety of effect, these achieve an imaginative beauty by the mere fact of affirming a new kind of relationship between man and man and man and nature.

All judgements on art are in a very large measure personal, but I do not remember having seen anything quite so effective, moving even, since discovering the bas-reliefs from the Stupa of Amraoti in the British Museum. There is about this Soviet sculpture a simplicity of statement, a directness and innocence of plastic perception, and ease of execution, which belong to great art; something, too, of that tender and compassionate humanism which is the underlying spirit of contemporary Soviet Culture.

Soviet literature is too vast a theme to be tackled here. But two observations come to one's mind in reading the work of modern Soviet writers. The first is that if they do not communicate a sense of greatness, they always impress one by their sincerity of purpose, a positive and hopeful outlook, amplitude of sympathy with struggling humanity, and faith in man's capacity to shape his own destiny, which are in striking contrast to the morbid despair and futility which are the fashionable themes of Western literature.

Secondly, if the Soviet writers do not always achieve elegance and perfection of form, they are also singularly and refreshingly free of any vulgarity, ostentation and perverse conceits. Admittedly, the contemporary Soviet writers have yet to give us an epic work which would be comparable to *War and Peace*. But there is sufficient promise in writers like Sholokov, Fadeyev, Bubennov, Azhayev, Ehrenburg and a score of others to justify the hope that one will not have long to wait. And, in any case, a new *War and Peace* would always be something worth waiting for.

## THE INDIVIDUAL AND LEADERSHIP IN THE U.S.S.R.

THIS is undoubtedly a very big theme to tackle after only a few weeks in the Soviet Union. By way of extenuation of the presumption involved, however, I might point out that many of India's national leaders feel no hesitation in pronouncing judgments on Russia without even an elementary knowledge of the way in which the Soviet system works and with no other authority behind them than the musty imbecilities of anti-Soviet Western propagandists. Why should a journalist fear to tread where exalted political simpletons are in the habit of rushing in? After all, I can claim some slight acquaintance with Russian affairs.

There are, obviously, two ways of considering the question. There is the theoretical approach. One can invoke the writings of Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin and Stalin to show precisely the role of the individual and leadership in a Socialist society. Secondly, there is the empirical approach: one can record one's impressions and observations as to how the individual and leadership do function in practice in the Soviet Union.

A truly comprehensive treatment of the issue ought to combine the theoretical and the empirical, but I do not feel qualified to undertake anything quite so ambitious. It will be sufficient for my purpose to note certain facts which cannot escape the attention of any honest observer visiting Russia and to make certain general inferences from these observations.

The first fact is this: for a state system which is supposed to deny all individual initiative and make the

human personality wholly subservient to an abstract, 'totalitarian' concept of polity, the Soviet Union seems more anxious to give publicity to individual achievement in all spheres of national life than those countries whose leaders never tire of avowing their Platonic attachment to the ideal of the supremacy of the individual. It is impossible to be in Russia even a few days without noticing that everywhere the positive and creative role of the individual in human affairs is not only recognised, but systematically stressed.

Every day since I have been here the pages of *Pravda* and *Izvestia* have contained long lists of names of men and women who have individually distinguished themselves in some department of nation-building activities. Each day, indeed, has appeared to be something of an Honours' Day. And it is not only that these names are printed in the Press and then relegated to the limbo of oblivion, to be remembered only in the uncomfotting memory of newspaper files. Their achievements are given practical recognition in the form of awards which entitle them to certain privileges, higher wages, special holidays, rent-free flats. Honours and privileges, it is true, are bestowed on people in other countries, too. But it is seldom that the humble and common people are gratefully remembered or their contribution to national effort rewarded as in the Soviet Union.

The civic statuary of a country is always significant, not in an aesthetic sense, but as the reflection of existing social relations. One can, for instance, walk through the capitals of the West looking in vain for the figure of a worker or peasant immortalized in stone or marble or bronze. One would find the streets, the squares and parks amply littered with mythological figures, with monarchs and their consorts, with generals and admirals and statesmen perched on tall columns or horseback or chairs of state, and sometimes, in countries where there is some respect for the arts (as in France) even poets and writers and artists. But the people who make the nation and create the wealth, the workers who toil and build, the peasants who till the land and sow and reap — they are

rarely considered worthy of being enshrined in national memory.

Only just before I left England a sculptor friend told me that for the past eighteen months he had been trying to interest the National Coal Board in the project for a group of sculpture representing the life of the British miner for the coming Festival of Britain Exhibition, and that despite the fact that the Miners' lodges in South Wales had enthusiastically recommended the suggestion, the Coal Board turned down the idea on the ground that it would be too costly! In Moscow he would have experienced no difficulty in getting his plan accepted. One has only to walk down the Metro Station at the Revolution Place to see all the different types of Soviet workers — the miner, the steel worker, the collective farmer, the railwayman, the shipbuilder — remembered in bronze. Indeed, the basic theme of contemporary Soviet art is the heroism of honest work, the labour and happiness of the common people.

More than that. It is not only as a type that the Soviet Union recognises the individual, but as a personality in his or her uniqueness of achievement. One of my most moving experiences in Moscow was during a visit to the Historical Museum which faces the beautiful Church of St. Basil across the Red Square. I had been wandering through its long rooms and corridors which unfold long and dim vistas of prehistory, and history, looking at pictures of the Neanderthal men crouching on perilous precipices with massive boulders at hand to hurl at the herd of unwary mammoths beneath; examining the medieval prints of Moscow; and admiring the rich imperial regalia of the Czars of all the Russians. The Russians have a way of making their museums interesting. But even so, after an hour and a half of this, I was beginning to be overcome by a kind of somnolence which is known to most visitors to museums and which can be described as museum fatigue. And then, as I walked up to the second floor of the building, I was suddenly confronted with a spectacle which galvanised me into alertness. It was part of the museum devoted to more recent

history and particularly to a record of the great patriotic war and the defence of Moscow.

Here, with the probing keenness of an intimate pang, one realised that history is not just the mouldering bones of the neolithic man overtaken by unknown disaster, or the delicate knick-knacks, the China and the glassware which the Czarinas collected in their boudoirs, or the runcinate faces of self-important politicians looking complacently down from their immortal perches on the walls at schoolgirls on an educational visit to the museum.

It is something infinitely more real and almost unbearably proximate. History is the partisans facing the improvised gallows, the gaping wounds of a civilian being kicked into a mass grave, the warm and quivering flesh of some Russian woman after the Herrenvolk had worked their will on her. But history is not only the negative, the unavailing suffering and pain, the stifled cries of the oppressed. Indeed, for a people who suffered so much at the hands of the Nazis, the Russians seem remarkably free from any pathological self-pity and from morbid obsession with atrocity stories.

On the contrary, it is always the positive and the heroic aspect of their war of liberation that is stressed. One undoubtedly sees in this room statues of Lenin and Stalin, the portraits of marshals and generals, of Zhukov and Voroshilov, of Vatutin and Bagramian, of Koniev and Rokossovsky. But one sees too the strangely joyous and defiant figure of Zoya the partisan girl, and hundreds of other ordinary soldiers, sailors, airmen, civilians, simple peasants and workers who knocked the guts out of Hitler's supermen and storm troopers and made victory possible. Their pictures, their letters from the front, their party cards are all carefully preserved and treasured as an epic legacy of greatness.

One has to come to the Soviet Union to appreciate what a people's war can and does mean. In the West, too, they invoked the slogan to arouse popular enthusiasm for the war. But it was a slogan which had little meaning for those who invoked it. The people were certainly in the war; they suffered and made sacrifices; but they were

largely passive tools in the struggle, being moved like pawns on a chessboard by their rulers.

There was, for instance, the famous poster which appeared on hoardings in the streets of London during the early stages of the war which said: "Your sacrifices, your courage, your steadfastness will win us victory." The poster was soon withdrawn when the enormity of the indiscretion involved was realised by the authorities. Nevertheless, it unconsciously revealed the spirit in which the ruling classes of Britain, and not only Britain but of the West in general, conducted the war. It is inconceivable that any propaganda agency in Moscow could ever have issued such a poster. It is inconceivable because the dichotomy of "you" and "us" does not operate in the Soviet Union. Ralph Parker, who has probably more intimate knowledge of the Soviet Union than any other correspondent in Moscow, in his *Conspiracy Against Peace* notes one very significant fact in this connection: he notes that when the Russians talk about anything concerning their State they always use the term "our".

The Western capitals usually have their tombs of the 'unknown soldier'. That is their way of remembering their dead. As far as I have been able to see there is no such thing as the tomb of the unknown soldier in Moscow. That is not, perhaps, accidental. For the Soviets their dead are not unknown entities: they are not anonymous flesh and bone fertilising the soil somewhere between the Volga and Elbe. They possess, instead, an immortal identity. One inevitably recalls the famous lines of Binyon inscribed on so many war memorials in England: "In the morning and at the going down of the sun, we shall remember them." Touching lines, even if a little sentimental. But how far has the promise been kept? Like the snows of yester year, human memory melts into oblivion, especially the official memory: the dead heroes of the wars of the Empires have long been forgotten by those who have enormously profited from their sacrifices.

But the Soviet Union does not forget its dead so easily: it is a people's state and the people have long me-

mories. Walk through the second storey of the Historical Museum, or the Museum of Revolution, or the Red Army Museum and see how the Soviets cherish the memory of the heroes of the Revolution, the Civil War and the War of Liberation. And they cherish this memory because the Soviet view of life recognises above all things the importance of the contribution of the individual in the strange and moving drama of the making of human destiny.

To say this, however, is not enough. We have to go a little deeper into the matter. For it raises certain fundamental questions urgently relevant to the moral problems of our age. In what sense does the Soviet view of life regard the individual as a significant determinant of the movement of history? And in what way does this significance differentiate itself from that which the bourgeois champions of the 'rights of the individual' attach to the term?

The answer to these questions are really very simple. The advantage of even a brief visit to the U.S.S.R. is that, when one sees the Soviet system at work with eyes that are not blinded by prejudice, these answers acquire a certain self-evident character. The Soviet point of view is that the individual does not function in a void; that as such he cannot be considered in isolation from the society in which he lives; and that his work must be subject to social judgement.

Individual contribution has to be assessed in relation to the progressive historical developments at any given moment. Not only its value, but its effectiveness is determined in the last analysis, the Soviets contend, by this relationship. They judge individual effort and achievement, not in the abstract, but in the concrete setting of the collective purpose. The measure of judgement is whether it advances or retards the growth and strengthening of a socialist society.

This proposition is essentially so sane, logical and morally unchallengeable that it is surprising that anybody endowed with normal rational faculties should find it difficult to understand or question its validity. Yet the bourgeois world does question its validity and finds it incomprehensible. It even regards this principle as an unpardonable violation of the rights of the individual and characterises it as 'totalitarianism'. Why? Largely, it may be suggested, because of the irreducible translucency inherent in the bourgeois approach to social problems and the fact that bourgeois thinking is still hopelessly involved in the fantasies of a pre-scientific age. This is only partially analytical. For if the bourgeois thinkers were to be really honest and analytical they would recognise that the bourgeoisie itself has applied a somewhat similar criterion of judgement to the individual.

During the past four centuries, the period which is specifically associated with the emergence, growth and decay of the bourgeois social order, it has sometimes unconsciously, but often consciously, systematically and vehemently encouraged the acquisitive, competitive and monopolistic type of individuality, even if it has found it convenient to pay lip-service to altruism and other Platonic virtues. It has not shown any particular tenderness towards those individuals who questioned the right of private ownership of the means of production, at least not until such individuals were safely dead and buried.

As the process of its internal decay and disintegration has become accelerated, the bourgeois social order has tended increasingly to throw overboard the ballast of its liberal pretensions. Not only Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Western Imperialist powers in the colonies, but post-Second World War America is a pertinent example of the extent to which it can go violently to suppress all trends of thought which undermine its basic ideological assumptions.

Where the Soviet Union has sinned is in this. First, it has held an unflattering mirror to bourgeois society by exposing the laws of its being and development and thus

shattering its self-esteem if not its illusions. Secondly, and this is, from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, the mortal sin, it has successfully established an alternative social order which, instead of giving free rein to the acquisitive, competitive and monopolistic urges and tendencies, directs all its energies to the fostering of a co-operative, highly responsible and altruistic type of personality.

It was necessary for the growth of the bourgeois society to develop human egotism, develop it even to the point of madness. It is equally necessary for a Socialist society to develop the co-operative, altruistic and responsible qualities in men and women. And the immense sense of stability and confidence which the Soviet Union inspires today is a measure of her success in this direction.

It would be naive to claim that everyone in the Soviet Union has achieved this ideal of perfection. The Russians do not make any such claims. If one were only interested in the negative and in probing weak spots one could doubtless point to the traces of the 'old Adam' which still survive, the vestiges of the past that continue to linger in the present. But that would hardly be an objective way of looking at the Soviet Union. For objectivity demands that one should recognise the essentials of a situation, not its irrelevancies. And the essential and relevant thing in the Soviet Union today is that an overwhelming majority of the Soviet people not only accept the values of the new society in theory, but are actually living them in practice.

This is precisely what makes the task of professional anti-Soviet propagandists an impossible one when they try to influence Soviet opinion. They may succeed in confusing the public in their own countries — and even themselves. But they make no sense to Soviet citizens. For the workers in the factory, the peasants on the collective farm and the shepherds in far off Dagastan know from their own experience that, far from denying their individuality, the Soviet system has for the first time enabled them to develop themselves, to grow to the full stature of manhood, to acquire human dignity, and to

breathe as free men in a world of free men.

It is, of course, always possible to argue and quibble, as the Celestials used to, till night seems day and day can be proved to be its opposite. This is what the cynical and disillusioned Western intelligentsia finds most pleasure in doing today. Having been deprived of all vital and creative function in society, reduced to mere unsavoury camp-followers of an obsolete ruling class, and unable to see the vast social injustices and evils much nearer home which need attention, they spend all their time (at a price, no doubt) in picking faults in the Soviet system and offering gratuitous sympathy to the Soviet people on their loss of individual freedom.

This would be comic, were it not also so tragic. For it is the kind of imbecility that is so useful to those who want to turn the tide of history and prolong human servitude. However, as far as the Soviet people are concerned, they seem to entertain no sort of apprehension about their freedom or rights as individuals being denied them.

And who should deny them their rights and freedom? The question is well worth posing. In the West and in certain circles in the East, too, there is much talk about the 'men in the Kremlin'. That only goes to show how little the bourgeois world has understood the significance of what happened in Russia in October 1917 even thirty years after the event, or the challenge which the Soviet system really presents to the capitalist world.

For the October Revolution was not just a palace or parlour revolution, the replacement of one ruling clique by another, but the capture of power by a new class — the working class. The leadership that has guided the Soviet Union ever since is drawn from and organically related to that class. It derives its strength and power from the workers in the factories and the fields.

Now it is a commonplace of social history that no leadership curtails the liberties of the class on which its power rests. For instance, one would not expect Mr. Churchill and his kin to deny freedom to the members of the Carlton Club or the City gentry; President Truman

to curb Wall Street; or the Congress to coerce the Indian tycoons of commerce and industry. Such a policy would not make sense; it would be highly unnatural and im-politic.

Similarly, it would be absurd, suicidal even, for the Communist Party in the Soviet Union to cut itself adrift and coerce the workers and peasants who are the ultimate source from which its power springs. After all, they were the first to carry through to a successful conclusion the first proletarian revolution in the world and they could do it again if they felt that anybody was interfering with their hard-won freedom.

But what of Stalin worship? It is perfectly true — and one need not be long in the Soviet Union to realise this — that the name of Stalin is magic. It is uttered with reverence and affection. But there is nothing mysterious, artificial or worked-up about this. The people of the Soviet Union — and today not only the people of the Soviet Union — honour him, as they honour Lenin, both as a symbol and as an individual. As a symbol because he represents their own triumphant achievements in building a socialist civilisation; and as an individual because he has never wavered in his loyalty to the interests and the cause of the working class and peasantry. This is the secret of his influence and popularity.

It is understandable why this simple fact is difficult for many Westerners, who profess radical views, to grasp. And for two reasons. Firstly, they have no experience of participation in any mass movement of revolutionary transformation and, therefore, cannot understand and do not even wish to understand the enthusiasms and loyalties which such a movement engenders.

Secondly, and this needs being stressed, the so-called evolutionary radical movements of Western Europe have not produced in recent memory a leadership even remotely comparable to the Soviet leadership in calibre, quality of integrity and disinterestedness. For who can feel any profound admiration, reverence or affection for the Kautskys, the Macdonalds, the Blums and....

But it would be superfluous to usurp the function of

prophecy. Events will fill in the blanks in time. It is more pertinent to formulate a conclusion. And the conclusion is this: when the Soviet publicists and writers claim that theirs is a monolithic social structure, it does not mean that all individual differences have been ironed out, that everybody thinks alike on everything. It means broadly two things. First, that all the basic social antagonisms have been eliminated and consequently there is general agreement on certain fundamentals of social existence. Secondly, it means that there is no hiatus, no social or psychological gulf between the leadership and the people: the two are integral to each other. That is the explanation of the monumental stability of the Soviet State.

## SOVIET DEMOCRACY

**T**HREE comes a time when every visitor to the Soviet Union finds himself mentally confronted with certain insistent and fundamental questions as to the nature and character of the Soviet system of polity. It is particularly opportune to formulate these questions just now, and for two reasons. Firstly, my stay in the Soviet Union is drawing to its end and it is, therefore, time to make up one's mind on the basic issues. Secondly, in a few days the Soviet people will be going to the polls, after nearly two months of intense political activity, to elect their representatives to the Supreme Soviet for the third time since the inauguration of the Stalin Constitution. This inevitably lends added pertinence to the problem. The questions which obstinately demand an answer are, broadly, these: Is the Soviet Union a democracy? And, if so, how precisely does it function?

To answer these questions it is essential to clear one's mind of the preconceptions and prejudices derived from an obsessive preoccupation with Western political systems. This is by no means an easy assignment. In the world in which we live it is becoming increasingly difficult to conduct rational discussion of human problems; and where the Soviet Union is concerned even relatively intelligent people have become prisoners of propagandist phrases accepted as viable terms of argument without any serious analysis.

It is, for example, almost impossible today to invoke the term 'democracy' in referring to the Soviet Union in the company of many Western intellectuals without immediately being stigmatised as crypto-Communist. For

them the perfection of democratic wisdom was reached in the 19th century and any political system which does not correspond with the British, American or French constitutional pattern must necessarily be undemocratic and totalitarian. General George G. Marshall at the last Memorial Day Address at the Arlington National Cemetery even went so far as to make the bold claim that the basic principles of the American form of Government "are timeless and have validity for all mankind."

One need not be a Communist to recognise that such arguments, whatever emotional validity they may possess for those who advance them, cannot be sustained on any historical grounds. Political forms are always organically related to the social structure. Thus the parliamentary and constitutional forms which the West evolved during the 18th and 19th centuries, and which many influential Western intellectuals have come to regard to-day as the finality of man's political destiny, were designed to serve the interests of the ascendant social forces of the time — specifically the rising bourgeoisie. Similarly, what strikes one as most impressive about the Soviet political system is that at every level it reflects decisively the social forces released by the October Revolution — the working class and the peasantry.

Objectively, therefore, what differentiates the Soviet Union from the Western political complex is not any formal issue of democracy: it is something more fundamental. Democracy is a term which, for the Soviets, is charged with a very different operative signification than that which it possesses for the West. For whereas, in the West, it is largely identified with the interests of those who own the means of production and distribution, in the Soviet Union it is an instrument for ensuring the paramountcy of the rights of those who produce wealth by their work, the workers in the fields and factories.

It is precisely this elementary and basic feature of the Soviet system of polity which the Western political theorists find so distasteful and intolerable. Yet a moment's dispassionate reflection should show them that in condemning the Soviets on this count they are not being

altogether consistent and that, in fact, they are applying far more exacting standards of judgement to the Soviet system than they do to their own.

For if the Soviet Union is to be regarded as a 'totalitarian' state because it denies political freedom to the capitalist class, then the bourgeois democracies of the West qualify for the same title, not only because they deny freedom to countless millions of colonial peoples, but for historical reasons, since the process by which the bourgeoisie itself rose to power involved drastic curtailment of the political freedom of the feudal classes and was by no means non-violent.

Indeed, in this respect, the position of the Marxist theorists is far more logical and consistent than that of their critics. For they, at least, frankly admit that they do not interpret freedom and democracy in an undifferentiated, historical or, as General Marshall would have it, in a 'timeless' sense; and they maintain that nobody has ever interpreted it in that sense in practice. In this best of all possible worlds where the exploitation of man by man is still an intractable fact of human experience, the freedom of the exploited can only be achieved by denying the freedom of exploitation to the exploiters. This seems common sense and the argument is accepted by an overwhelming majority of the Soviet people — and for the excellent reason that, before the Revolution liberated them, the only freedom which many of them enjoyed was the freedom to starve.

Furthermore, the absence of rival political parties, of formal opposition groups, which the Western observers find so disquieting, does not seem to trouble the Soviet citizens. They are inclined even to rejoice at this. Rival political parties where they imply something more than the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee, they argue, must imply the existence of sharply antagonistic classes and forces within the body social. The monolithic political structure of the Soviet Union, they suggest with some cogency, is an indication that these antagonisms have been eliminated, that collective ownership of the means of production has been established, and that

the Soviet society is approaching homogeneity.

However, the fact that no rival political groupings and parties are allowed to function in the Soviet Union does not mean that the Communist Party has the exclusive monopoly of power. Undoubtedly, as the Party which has carried through the building of the Socialist system, it has the decisive power and its prestige has never stood higher than it does today. But it is also true — a fact which is conveniently obscured or suppressed by the Western propagandists — that it shares this power with people who do not belong to the Party. From a long-term point of view, indeed, one of the most significant political developments in the Soviet Union in recent years has been the establishment of increasingly cordial relationship between the Party and non-Party elements.

Stalin, whose formulations always deserve the most careful attention of anyone who wishes seriously to understand the Soviet Union, himself defined this new relationship in his election speech in February 1946. He declared: "The non-Party people are united with the Communists in one common, collective body of the Soviet people. Within this collective body they fought side by side to consolidate the might of our country, they fought side by side and shed their blood on the various fronts for the sake of the freedom and greatness of our Motherland, and side by side they hammered out and forged our country's victory over her enemies. The only difference between them is that some belong to the Party and some do not. But this difference is only a formal one. The important thing is that all are engaged in one common cause...."

This is even truer in 1950 than it was in 1946. A much larger number of non-Party people have, for example, been chosen as candidates for the Supreme Soviet at the present than at the last elections. This is significant, not because it means return to the party system of bourgeois democracy but because it indicates that the moral and political unity of the Soviet society has reached a higher stage. The gradual elimination of the distinction between Party and non-Party cadres may well

be considered as the reflection on the political plane of the rapid transition from Socialism to Communism.

Theoretically, then, it is unquestionable that the Soviet Union is precisely what the Soviet Constitution declares it to be — a Socialist state of workers and peasants. As such it is more broad based than the formal democracies of the West. It is not enough, however, to consider the issue theoretically. After all, it is possible for the theoretically most perfect democratic constitutions to become mere facades behind which small ruling cliques and party caucuses can consolidate their power. Ultimately, democratic practice alone is the real test of any democracy. What of the Soviet practice?

During my stay in the Soviet Union I had opportunity to watch the electoral campaign from fairly close quarters; and I can vouch for it that I have not seen anything quite so intensive or intelligent anywhere else. What distinguishes it from the elections I have seen in Western Europe is that electors are not mere passive agents whose only function is to listen to the exuberant rhetoric of rival candidates and then one day put a cross against a name on a slip of paper. They have a far more active role. They select the candidates themselves.

The election, in fact, takes place in two stages: first the selection of a candidate by the electoral districts and then the confirmation of this choice by the electors on election day on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot. In the interval between the first selection and the election, it is obligatory for the candidates to provide full information about themselves and their policies and work to the electors.

For this purpose, *Agitpunkts*, literally meaning agitation points, are set up at convenient places in every electoral district. These ephemeral institutions are a distinctive and rather entertaining feature of the Soviet elections. They serve at once as rallying points for political workers and as information centres. They are open from early morning till late at night and thousands of people daily visit them.

I have seen *Agitpunkts* in all sorts of places — in

remote kolkhozes in Georgia and in the Great Muscova Hotel, in schools and in department stores, at aerodromes and railway stations, in factories and even in hospital wards. The idea, presumably, is to turn the election into an intensive course of political education for the Soviet citizens. And it really does work and accounts for the heavy voting at all elections in the Soviet Union. For the Soviet elector takes his right to vote with the utmost seriousness.

What kind of people are chosen as representatives to the Supreme Soviet? A few examples should suffice to indicate the quality of representation. Stalin's statement that "it is not property status, not national origin, not sex, nor office, but personal ability and personal labour" that determine the choice truly describes the situation. For if the name of Stalin appears at the head of the list of candidates — he was actually the first choice from all constituencies in the Soviet Union — so does that of the Kemerovo miner Semykin; if Stalin Prize novelist Fadeyev is among the candidates so is Blinov the locomotive driver on the South Urals Railway; Vavilov, President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, shares the honour of candidature with Comrade Generalov, the chairman of the kolkhoz at Lubertze on the Oka River; Tarasova, one of the most gifted actresses in Moscow who has been giving a memorable performance as Anna in *Anna Karenina* at the Arts Theatre, is a fellow-candidate with Shtyrova, the weaver who initiated the multi-loom movement.

There is no doubt that the Supreme Soviet is far more representative of the Soviet people than some parliamentary bodies one could name where money talks. And the fact that the electors have the power to recall their representatives if they prove to be unsatisfactory ensures that the Soviet deputies, unlike deputies and parliamentarians in some other countries, cannot afford to forget their promises or their electors in the inter-election period.

It is, of course, true that many foreign observers in the Soviet Union are not impressed by the working of

the Soviet democratic system. They dismiss it as colossal make-believe and stage-management, intended apparently to impress those very foreigners who will never be impressed by anything that the Soviets do — no matter how good. They are welcome to their insane scepticism. The Soviet people today are not worried about what the foreign journalists or diplomats think of their political system. For their own part they entertain no sort of doubt that their democracy is something real, vital and growing. And how could it be otherwise? From their experience they can verify that even the humblest Soviet citizen today participates in shaping the political destiny of this vast multi-national state. That is the distinctive achievement of Soviet Democracy.

## PROOF OF THE PUDDING

I WAS in Tbilisi when the great news broke. It was not altogether unexpected. One had guessed that something like this was on the way. Indeed, one rumour in Moscow was that the Soviet Government wanted the announcement of price reductions to coincide with Stalin's 70th birthday, but that the Generalissimo expressly did not wish it to be so. "I am an old man of seventy," he is reported as having said to his colleagues in the Kremlin, "and there are many other old men like me in the Soviet Union. No special significance should be given to my birthday." However, though everybody expected some price reductions, since the reductions were not announced on Stalin's birthday or the New Year day, it was generally felt that the announcement would come later in the year when prospects for this year's harvest could be more accurately assessed. What is more, nobody expected the reductions to be quite so sweeping and drastic.

All prices were marked down overnight from twenty to forty per cent while the wages, salaries, stipends, pensions, family allowances, bonuses remained exactly as before. A simple arithmetical calculation would show that this meant an overnight rise in the standard of living of the people of something in the neighbourhood of thirty per cent.

This exceeded the most optimistic forecasts and it was hardly surprising that the citizens of Tbilisi, temperamentally exuberant like all Georgians, went quite wild with joy when they heard the news. There were extraordinary scenes of rejoicing in the streets, and the next

day, and for several days after, there was a rush for buying such as was never witnessed in the City of Warm Waters before. And what is true of Tbilisi is true of the rest of the Soviet Union. On my way back to Moscow I had to stay one night at Kharkov owing to bad flying weather. In the hotel at the aerodrome I had occasion to talk to some Red Army men, whose plane was also grounded, on their way to Kiev from Krasnodar. They said they were at the theatre when the news was announced over the loudspeakers and they added that, although the spectacle was excellent, they could not concentrate on the show that night.

In Moscow the public rejoicing was sufficiently spectacular to attract the notice even of the Western newspaper correspondents who are normally too preoccupied with their desperate search for some comforting sign of the decline of the Soviets. Of course, they interpreted the event in their characteristically original and realistic way. "Authoritarian reduction of prices," was the charitable description given by the French 'Socialist' paper *Franc-Tireur*; and the trans-Atlantic Press, including the 'responsible' *New York Times*, intoned the dreary theme that all this was merely Red propaganda. But, as Comrade Surkov remarked to me, there must be many million people in the capitalist world who would not object to similar 'authoritarian' acts on the part of their Governments. And as for propaganda, he added, the Russians claim no patent rights on this particular device and would be only too glad to see the United States administration announce similar price reductions.

Needless to say that this suggestion is not likely to be taken up by the United States or any other capitalist Government. With the Cold War, not to mention so many colonial wars, on their hands, price reductions would hardly ease their economic position. The point, however, is not merely that the Soviets have gained yet another debating point in their argument with the West. Neither the Soviet people nor their Government are particularly interested in scoring debating points. They are far too busy with the much more important task of

accelerating the transition from Socialism to Communism to indulge in futile debates of this kind.

The real significance of this event lies in the fact that it has provided the clearest and most convincing demonstration of the immense recuperative power of the Soviet economy. The Western 'experts' — the same knowledgeable and profound men who gave the Soviet Union exactly six weeks against Hitler's armies — had been predicting that it would take decades for the Soviet Union to recover from the effect of a war which devastated some of the richest and most highly developed regions; and that even so, it would require large-scale dollar aid from America — aid which the Russians could only hope to have at the price of their convictions and their national honour.

But the Russians have once again proved these prophets of woe to have been wrong in their wishful calculations. In less than five years after the end of the war they have not only caught up with their pre-war production, but exceeded it by 41 per cent. Indeed, the figures for the current year are likely to be even more startling. Already, during the first quarter of 1950, the index of industrial production has risen by 22 per cent over the figure for the corresponding period in 1949. This increase has been achieved, moreover, despite the worst that the West could do by organising economic blockade and denying the Soviets access to the machinery and goods they needed and were prepared to buy for cash on perfectly normal business terms.

It has been achieved also in spite of the Cold War which has compelled them to divert so much of their national energy from the pressing tasks of construction and reconstruction. It is no exaggeration to suggest that if the Cold War were to end tomorrow the standard of living of the Soviet people would go up within twenty-four hours by anything up to fifty per cent. That is why everybody in the Soviet Union passionately desires peace.

Nothing brings out the profound difference between the two systems more sharply than this fact. For where-

as a *détente* in the international situation would mean an immediate improvement in the standard of living of the Soviet people, in the capitalist world it would mean a deepening of the economic crisis, spectacular increases in unemployment, and fall in production. However, Cold War or no Cold War, the Soviets are confident that within the next twelve months there will be a further and significant drop in the cost of living. In fact, one more price reduction of the magnitude of the present one would bring the prices of most consumer goods to the pre-war level while wages all along the line are today approximately twice as high as pre-war. The capitalist world has nothing to show like this — and, in the nature of things, it cannot have.

But that is not all. If the immediate perspective for Soviet economy is bright, the long-term perspective is even brighter. True, the world Press pays little attention to developments in the Soviet Union — and especially to developments in the Soviet East. It is too busy reporting marriages and divorces of film stars, murders, robberies, human touch stories about social parasites, to find space for reports on the progress of the Soviet Five Year Plan.

A high Foreign Office official in Moscow, whom I had been telling of the interest of the Indian people in the Soviet Union, sadly remarked that, despite this interest, hardly a newspaper in India had given any details of the Report of the Central Statistical Board of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. By way of extenuation I could only say that the bulk of the Indian Press is owned by the plutocratic dynasties of India who are chiefly interested in preventing objective truth about the Soviet Union being known and as such the Indian Press should not be taken as reflecting correctly the interest or the sentiments of the Indian people in this matter.

But whether or not the Press and the public in the outside world take note of the trend of economic development in the U.S.S.R., that upward trend is there and is certain to become even more accentuated with each month and year that passes. Realities do not become

less real because some people decide ostentatiously to turn their back on them or shut their eyes to them.

And the most striking reality about the Soviet Union for any unbiased observer is this: that Soviet economy has reached a decisive point of strength and that from now on its expansion is going to be constant and will follow the line of geometrical progression. It is not an empty boast when Fadeyev, the author of *The Young Guard*, says: "We already live well and we hope to live even better." For this hopeful sentiment is not merely wishful: it is based on increasing evidence of their own experience of well-being and the certain knowledge of the historical forces which are changing the whole balance of economic power in the world.

Demonstrably, it is premonition of this coming event that is casting a shadow over the chancellories of the West and explains Mr. Acheson's gloomy, public ruminations on the topic of "total diplomacy" as the latest weapon in the 'hotting up' of the 'Cold War'. After all, it is not possible to fool all the people all the time; and having predicted the collapse of the Soviet system so often, the Western oracles are going to experience some difficulty in explaining away its continued and growing strength. The more so because the triumphs of Soviet economy have come at a time when the prospects for the capitalist world, to put it mildly, are not exactly promising. That is why the Russians are convinced, as both Stalin and Molotov have recently declared, that in peaceful economic competition, the Soviet system will prove its superiority over the capitalist system. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

## THE SOVIET UNION AND THE WEST

IT IS NOT necessary to be long in Moscow to notice that the most uncomfortable people in the Soviet capital today are the members of the diplomatic missions of the Western Powers and their many satellites. The feeling of discomfort from which they suffer, let me hasten to add, is not necessarily due to any physical reasons, such as shortage of living space. In the matter of *lebensraum*, in fact, they are more fortunate than the representatives of the popular democracies of Eastern Europe.

The Americans, for example, have their Embassy in one of the most elegant buildings in the whole of Moscow within a stone's throw of the Red Square; and the British Embassy on the Sophiiskaya Embankment enjoys an even more magnificent outlook on the Kremlin. Nor can one account for their unhappiness by referring to the restrictions imposed by the Protocol on the free circulation of diplomatic personalities in the Soviet Union. These restrictions are doubtless exasperating, but they constitute only one of the minor elements of discomfort which actually antedates them and may well outlast them. For this discomfort, in the last analysis, has its origin in deeper psychological causes and may well be attributed to the fact that the Western diplomats in the Soviet Union find themselves confronted with a social reality which is so completely alien to their experience that they do not even wish to make an effort to adjust themselves to it.

What is true of these diplomats is true of the Governments which they represent. The gulf which divides the Soviet Union from the Western Powers has never been

wider; and if anything is certain in the present nightmare of uncertainties it is that the alienation between the East and West will grow even more acute in the coming months as "Total Diplomacy" begins to unfold itself. As this alienation has become the neuralgic focus of world politics, carrying within it the potentialities of a global catastrophe, it is worth while clarifying the issues while we still enjoy the luxury of free discussion.

The easiest thing in the world would be to put the blame for the situation on the Russians. That is the fashionable theory. But fashionable theories are not always an accurate interpretation of the world in which we live; and this particular theory will not stand serious examination. A dispassionate retrospect of the evolution of the relationship between the Eastern and the Western Powers during the past thirty-two years might even lead one to quite an opposite conclusion. For during this period the West, in its dealings with the Soviets, has not been conspicuously friendly.

Cold War, a term which even the *Economist* has come to acknowledge as being of American inspiration and origin, is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Long before it, however, there was a shooting war. Indeed, if the Soviet State did not break up during the early years of its existence, it was not for want of trying on the part of the West. The War of Intervention, in which mercenaries of practically every Western power joined to be in at the expected kill, was eventually called off. But not the economic blockade which was calculated to prove an even deadlier weapon. It misfired. The Soviets managed to survive; and it was the capitalist world which found itself in an economic morass from which it could extricate itself only by embarking on a large-scale rearmament programme and the path to the abyss of war.

When the economic blockade failed, it did not lead to the establishment of normal relations between the Soviet Union and the West. On the contrary, upon the ruins of the policy of direct and indirect intervention was built the even more disastrous policy of *cordon*

*sanitaire* which was to culminate in the monumental fiasco of Munich and the Second World War.

It is true that, with the Soviet entry into the War in June 1941, there was some attenuation of the Western hostility towards the Soviets, or, perhaps, one should say, there was an appearance of attenuation. For, as the backstage facts regarding Western diplomacy during the war years come to light, it becomes increasingly clear that there had been no real change of heart or of mind. Even while verbal encomiums were being uttered to the Russians for their sacrifices in the common cause — and seven million Russian lives are cheap enough at the cost of a few verbal bouquets — plans were being worked out discreetly, and often not even discreetly, for the post-war struggle for power.

Ralph Parker in his book *The Conspiracy Against Peace* records one of the most startling instances of what some of the Western diplomats were thinking all that time. He records the remarks of a certain well-known American diplomat whom he had occasion to meet on Victory Day in the Soviet capital. For those were the days when he had not yet fallen from grace and, as the accredited correspondent of *The Times*, had easy access to the American Embassy. The diplomat in question, watching the cheering Moscow crowds from the Embassy window, ominously said to Parker: "They are cheering.....They think the war is over, but it is only just beginning."

That diplomat had a prophetic soul. And why not? He was none other than Mr. George F. Kennan, the notorious Mr. X of *Foreign Affairs* fame, who until a few months ago was the chief policy-planner of the State Department. But the point is not to emphasise Mr. Kennan's clairvoyance which is obvious. The point is to stress that there has been very little in the whole record of the Western attitude to the Soviets which could be interpreted as friendliness, decency or even normal courtesy due to a great people and a great power.

With the exception of the brief interlude of make-believe during World War II, the Western Powers in all

their transactions with the Soviets have shown themselves consistently intransigent, intolerant and intolerable. In view of this morbid record and background, it is hardly surprising that the Russians are highly mistrustful of the West. What is really surprising is that, notwithstanding all their past experience, the Soviet leaders, from Stalin downwards, still continue repeatedly to proclaim not only the possibility of an understanding with the West, but the desirability and urgent need for such an understanding.

This is the paradox which strikes one in Moscow as most curious. It is the aggrieved party in the quarrel which holds out the olive branch and it is the Western Powers who find it difficult to forgive the wrongs they have done to the Soviet. The Western argument, of course, is that the olive branch is merely a camouflage behind which the Soviet Union is preparing her designs for a war of aggression. Already, they assert, like Mr. Crossman, "the Russians have far exceeded their sociological frontiers." Such arguments betray either a perversity that is unequalled or a capacity for self-deception that is infinite.

For to any objective person it is clear that it is not the Soviets who are building military bases from the Arctic to the Antarctic, threatening the cities of the West with atomic annihilation, or bombing villages and towns in Malaya, Indo-China and China. "The only base we are interested in building and strengthening," Mr. Surkov observed in a conversation with me, "is our own country. If people in other countries follow our example and get rid of landlords and capitalists, it is not our fault." It was not the Soviet Union which poured billions of dollars worth of arms into China to bolster up a reactionary and dying social order.

As regards the Western charge that "the Soviets have far exceeded their sociological frontiers," the Russians marvel at the audacity bordering on impudence of such an accusation coming from such a quarter. They argue that if the Soviet Union is to be accused of trespassing beyond her alleged 'sociological frontiers' on the

ground that she has prevented counter-revolutionary intervention in Eastern Europe, then what are they to think of the Western Powers which claim the right to have their frontiers as far away from their 'sociological' homelands as Hong Kong and Singapore, to fight colonial wars in Asia and Africa all in the interest of 'freedom' of the 'free world', and to maintain military bases anywhere between the North Cape and the Land of the Rising Sun.

In the nature of things, these arguments and counter-arguments can be indefinitely prolonged. But they lead nowhere. People will accept one or the other according to their sympathies and their social status. But whatever one's views — and I believe that on any objective reckoning the Soviet case is unanswerable and will be vindicated by the course of events — there is at least one point on which there is no room for disputation. That point is simply this: if the vicious circle of charge and counter-charge is to be broken and the present global deadlock to be resolved, then there has got to be some renunciation of self-righteous attitudes, a return to a sense of realism and a willingness to discuss differences, without insistence by either party that the other must come to the conference table in sackcloth and ashes.

On this issue it is not merely partisanship which leads one to the conclusion that the Soviet Union has shown and continues to show far more reasonableness and willingness to discuss things than the West. Indeed, hardly a day passes in Moscow without the organs of Soviet opinion taking up the theme of co-existence of the Soviet and the non-Soviet world and the need for talks between the great powers at the highest level. On the other hand, the Western Powers, which are prepared to spend colossal sums on armaments, appear to be obstinately reluctant to defray the expenses of a second Congress of Vienna.

This obstinately negative policy is, on the face of it, incomprehensible. It is bad politics and bad propaganda. And it is not without a perverse logic. The Western leadership has come to a point in its historical and mental evolution where it can neither afford a genuine peace

settlement nor afford a war. It cherishes peace aims which are wholly fantastic and could be attained only through a successful war; and all but those who, like the late James Forrestal, have crossed into the realm of certifiable lunacy know that the chances of the West winning a war are remote. Nevertheless, the idea of reconciling itself to co-existence is unbearable for the Western leadership. It objects not merely to certain facets of Soviet policy, but to the very existence of the Soviet State. It still believes, with the persistence of a hopeless passion, as indeed it has always believed ever since October 1917, that the Soviets are a transitory phenomenon and that the course of history can somehow magically be reversed.

In fostering this wishful belief, one has the impression that the Western diplomats have played, and continue to play, a distinguished part. Most of them remind one by their attitude and outlook of the old Anglo-India and the Old China Hands. Their knowledge of the Soviet Union, its people and ideals would not fill the back of a postage stamp. On the other hand, their store of fantastic folklore, largely inventions of their own fertile imaginative imbecility, is quite inexhaustible. They look upon the Russians as parvenus in the sphere of world politics; and they feel really aggrieved, as James Aldridge has shown so well in his *Diplomat*, when the Russians insist on their rights and show themselves altogether more successful in diplomacy. Their attitude to the Soviets is an unhealthy mixture of envy, contempt and frustrated purpose.

This attitude may well be rooted in the divergence of economic, political and social doctrines, but today it goes beyond that divergence. It has hardened, in fact, into a psychological complex which inhibits any adjustment to the realities of the world situation and thus offers an even more stubborn obstacle to an understanding with the Soviets than the differences of ideology. Yet sooner or later, the West will have to learn to outgrow this infantile complex and reconcile itself to the fact that the Soviet Union cannot be wished out of existence and there is no

way of exorcising the forces of social revolution which are stirring all over the world. It will have to learn to respect the U.S.S.R., and accept the idea of co-existence. For the alternative to co-existence and peaceful competition of the two systems is a conflict — a conflict, moreover, which can only end with even speedier disintegration and defeat of the Western system of polity.

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

IT WOULD obviously be sheer presumption to claim that any conclusions formed after so brief a journey through the Soviet Union can be anything more than tentative. One winter, spent largely in Moscow, hardly entitles one to make sweeping statements about any country, least of all a country which is almost a Continent in the process of one of the most remarkable social transformations witnessed in human history. A comprehensive understanding of the U. S. S. R. would require several years of intensive study of the country and its people. And yet, it is not merely love of paradox that urges one to claim that even tentative conclusions need not be wholly superficial. After all it is not necessary to eat the whole dish to know its essential flavour; nor, for that matter, is it necessary to spend long years among a people to recognise the distinctive quality of their way of life.

The Soviet Union, moreover, presents to an observer very special problems of understanding. In a sense these problems are simpler and in a sense they are more complex than in the case of most other countries. They are simpler in that the character of Soviet life has an impressively even texture: no matter at what point or level one touches it, it communicates the same quality of social harmony. They are more complex in the sense that the quality of the Soviet ethos is so sharply differentiated from anything to which one is accustomed outside the Soviet Union that it demands an initial effort to adjust the mechanism of one's responses to it. They are more complex, too, because nobody goes to the Soviet Union without already having some ideas, right or wrong, about

the country; and these ideas, if they do not actually distort one's optics, tend to set up a certain distracting duality in one's mind. One is at once receiving impressions and trying to relate them to one's preconceptions about the U.S.S.R.

Indeed, it would be true to say that one goes to Russia not so much to seek new impressions as to seek verifications of what one has previously thought about her. This applies equally to those who are friendly and those who are hostile to the Soviet system. Inevitably, there are two different planes on which verification is needed. There is the material plane and there is the moral plane. Ultimately, this dichotomy is perhaps unreal: at least the Russians think so, since they do not conceive of moral and material development taking place in separate water-tight compartments. But for an outsider, habituated as he or she is to the bifurcation of the moral and material levels of being, a double confirmation is imperative.

On the material plane, the problem of verification is comparatively simple. We have only to consider the index of industrial production of the pre-revolutionary Russia beside the report of the State Planning Commission on the progress of the first post-war Five Year Plan for 1949 to get a measure of the material advance registered since October 1917. A backward, quasi-feudal country has been transformed within the span of life of a single generation into a major industrial power. There has not been over the same period any development of comparable magnitude either in the Old World or the New.

This much, at any rate, is not disputed even by the most inveterate opponents of the Soviet system. It could not be disputed. For though it is possible to juggle with words and produce original sophistries in interpreting facts, economic realities have a way of overtaking us. And the economic strength of the Soviet Union today cannot be ignored.

Over twenty million tons of annual output of steel, the expansion of coal production from under eight million

tons in 1920 to almost two hundred and fifty million tons in 1949, electrification schemes of continental dimensions, irrigation and afforestation projects which are changing the map of the U.S.S.R. and beside which the T.V.A. would appear a minor pilot scheme, mechanisation of agriculture on so vast a scale that by 1941 the Soviet Union already possessed more tractors and combine harvesters than the whole of Western Europe put together — these and many other too, too solid witnesses of Soviet effort cannot be demolished even by the heat of the most incandescent of prejudices.

If any Western nation had such a record of achievement to its credit, it would never stop singing its praises and indulging in the tempting ritual of self-adoration. But it is not only that the Soviets have achieved so much in so short a time. We have also to see the conditions under which this epic achievement was realised. For the conditions under which the Soviet experiment had to be carried to a successful conclusion could not be described as favourable by anybody conversant with the history of the past three decades.

There was, to begin with, the legacy of a corrupt, reactionary and obscurantist regime to be overcome. Then, during the period when the Soviet economy was being built, the Soviet Union had to face not merely the indifference of the industrially advanced countries of the West, but their active hostility. Nothing that the Western powers could do to hinder, retard and otherwise frustrate the Soviet plans for construction and reconstruction was left undone. Finally, there were the four years of the Second World War, fought not by expeditionary forces on some distant and alien soil, but over the good Russian earth; a War which devastated some of the most highly developed regions and fertile lands in the Soviet Union and took a toll of seven million lives.

Such is the background of difficulties against which one has to see and judge the Soviet development. By all standards of expert opinion the Soviet Union ought never to have succeeded in overcoming these difficulties. Indeed, one sometimes gets the impression that of the

many things which the anti-Soviets have against the Russians, not the least is the fact that the Soviets have confounded all the prophets of woe who have so often predicted her downfall and pronounced premature requiems over her.

These prophets have some even more heartbreaking disappointments ahead of them. For to any dispassionate observer in Russia today it is clear that an entirely new stage in the development of the Soviet economy has been reached, opening up a perspective of progress which staggers the imagination. Until now the Soviet people have had to make do, to suffer and endure hardships and shortages so as to create the instruments which would enable them to exploit the infinite riches of their land. Today they have most of the necessary instruments and what has hitherto been only a quantitative change in the level of Soviet prosperity is bound increasingly to acquire a qualitative character.

Stalin has spoken of sixty million tons of steel by 1960. Nothing but a war, perhaps not even a war, can prevent the realisation of that objective. And steel, in this context, means much more than steel — or even bath plugs (which symbolise truth for Lord Citrine), fancy cigarette lighters and refrigerators which loom so large on the conceptual horizon of the Western Man in search of earthly bliss. It means all this of course. But it also means something more: it means the attainment of a future for which the Soviet people have worked so hard and endured so much.

It is at this point that certain considerations of a moral order become relevant, even imperative. What is this future of which everybody in the Soviet Union speaks as though it were something tangible and palpable? Is it merely further industrialisation of the country to catch up with America? Is it merely more houses, hospitals, schools?

Certainly, these material amenities are comprehended in the Soviet conception of the future. But the Soviet people are far too profound to have so limited and narrow a view of human destiny. Their conception of the future

goes far beyond the attainment of material prosperity. Indeed, in the Soviet Union one is often reminded of a pregnant observation of Bakunin where he noted that in practice the materialists behave like idealists and the idealists behave like materialists.

For the greatest achievement of the Soviets appears to be that they have created a new social framework in which it is the altruistic rather than the acquisitive and selfish urges of man that get an opportunity for free development. Theirs is a society which not only permits human idealism to be really effective, but indeed creates the conditions for the growth of genuine as opposed to spurious idealism; it is a society in which human beings are not separated from each other by social distances.

During the Second World War, when under the stress of adversity even the West was compelled reluctantly to acknowledge some truths about the Soviet Union, J. B. Priestly in a series of broadcasts made an interesting point that every nation cherishes some unique dream of its own which it tries to translate into reality. And he added that in the case of the Soviet Union, it is the dream of human fraternity. I would like to go further than Mr. Priestly. Fraternity is not just a dream for the Soviet people: it is a reality. The essence of the Soviet way of life is this: it assumes a social order in which men are not at war with each other, a world where the happiness of any individual is not built on the misery of somebody else. That is what the future means to them.

Having said this, I must qualify. The U.S.S.R. is not a place for perfectionists; it is not the land of heart's desire after the pattern of Utopian imagination. For a new civilisation and a new social order, unlike the Bodhisattvas, do not emerge from the dark womb of history with all the thirty-two marks of perfection clearly and visibly stamped upon them. They acquire coherence and refinement only through a painful process of trial and error and experiment. It is perhaps an unconscious compliment to the Soviet Union that her critics argue on the basis that she should have completed the whole curve of her development in thirty years where other forms of social orga-

nisations have taken centuries, often millennia, to perfect even their imperfections. But the Soviet people themselves are not interested in compliments. What they want is understanding, a realistic balance of what they have achieved against the difficulties with which they had to grapple. "See the good with the bad", Stalin once told the Dean of Canterbury.

No doubt there are defects in the Soviet system; no doubt, too, certain things might be done otherwise. But these defects are so insignificant, so trivial, that they detract nothing from the monumental material and moral progress of the Soviet people. That progress is the most heartening fact of contemporary history. Heartening, because it restores one's faith in man when there are so many siren voices who wish to destroy that faith.

One last conclusion deserves to be recorded. For a journalist, the U.S.S.R. is today unquestionably the most stimulating country to visit. It is not only that much that is truly heroic is being accomplished, but that behind the immense constructive activity one feels the impact of a conscious and intelligent purpose, the momentum of a collective Apollonian will of a whole people. It is true that much remains to be done, and there are old disorders which have yet to be eliminated. But it is also true that nowhere else are men moulding their own destiny with such clarity of aim as in the Soviet Union. It is an epic theme for any writer. But there comes the rub. In writing about it one is haunted by a sense of inadequacy of what one writes. There is, however, the consolation that even the Soviet writers themselves have not yet been able to do full justice to a theme so vast, so noble, and charged with such urgency of significance for the future of mankind.

## FAREWELL TO MOSCOW

ALL generalisations in such matters can only possess a personal validity, but I hold the view that one must stay in a place either two years or two months. The former is the minimum period necessary for getting to know a city really well, to study the life of its citizens properly, and to get attuned to the rhythm of its collective existence and the idiosyncrasies of its inhabitants. But those who cannot afford two years should try to stay at least two months. It is a reasonable period for gaining a limited, but not altogether superficial, impression of a metropolis. For it is during the first eight weeks that the perceptive faculties and responses of a visitor are at their most alert; each new sight and sound and smell brings with it the delicious exhilaration of discovery. After this initial period the intensity of one's reactions inevitably tends to wane; familiarity with the scene blunts the edge of one's vision; a drowsy numbness settles over one's awareness so that one begins to take things for granted, even to find one's way around without as much as looking at the names of the streets.

I stayed in Moscow just over the qualifying period. But Moscow, I must add, is a special case. As I have already said, life for a visitor in the Soviet capital is richer in experience and impression than anywhere else today. And for two reasons. Firstly, thanks to the untiring exertions of the anti-Soviet scribes, a visitor to Moscow is bound to be somewhat more wide awake than a visitor to London, New York, Paris or Rome. One tends to look at things more intensely; or rather, one not only looks at things but behind and beyond them — at their

significances. One looks straight and one tries to look round the corners. One sees the larger landscape and one notes the microscopic detail which may lead one to the heart of the matter. More than seeing and noting things, one is all the time trying to relate them to one's expectations and preconceptions. All this invests one's impressions with a kaleidoscopic depth and with almost febrile intensity.

But there is also a second reason which is ultimately more important. It is that Moscow life really is different from the life in any other capital I have visited. Not that the citizens of Moscow outwardly look very different from any other metropolitan population. Like the citizens of any other city, they present the same miscellaneous physiognomies and are infinitely various in their tastes, interests, and pursuits. But there is something that does distinguish them; it is the frame within which their activities are organised which gives their collective life an order, a sense of coherence, the organic character of a community which is so lacking in the experience of those city dwellers of the West for whom Spengler has coined the apt term "megalopolitan."

Each individual citizen, of course, has his private and intimate life; and he or she performs public functions just as the citizens of any other country — the bank clerk works at his ledger and the office worker at his desk, the dustmen (and dustwomen) sweep the snow from the streets, the engineer works in the factory, the shop assistant serves at the counter just as bank clerks, office workers, dustmen, engineers and shop assistants anywhere else. And yet there is a difference.

The difference is that the orbit of individual life is not insulated from the orbit of collective endeavour, that the two are interlocking, and that the majority of people are fully aware of this relationship as something vital and living. It is this which gives their individual efforts and achievements an added significance, a meaning transcending personal ambitions, a luminous quality of heroism and nobility. It is this, too, which explains why in Moscow one rarely sees a spiv or a butterfly; why

nobody seems to be at a loose end. There is a purposiveness about Moscow life — and in this the capital merely reflects the whole country — which is not lost upon even those observers who find the underlying purpose of the Soviets an abomination.

Cities have their peculiar atmospherics, their spiritual tones, as it were. In 1950 the atmosphere of Moscow is charged with an exhilarating optimism. The ambient mood is one of hope, of confidence in the Soviet destiny. There is a feeling which seems to be shared by everybody who matters — from the lift porter to the members of the Politbureau — that the Soviet people have come through the ordeal; that though there may well be difficulties ahead, they cannot be anything like those that have already been successfully negotiated; that with each week and month that passes, life for everyone is going to become fuller and richer, materially and spiritually.

This hopefulness and confidence is to be noticed not only in the Party slogans, the editorials of *Pravda*, or the public pronouncements of Soviet leaders. One may, if one happens to be oversceptical, dismiss these as just so much propaganda. But one cannot dismiss, quite so lightly, the jokes that are going round Moscow. They reflect the optimism and confidence of the Soviet people more convincingly than the official oracles. For instance, just before I left Moscow, one story was causing a good deal of amusement. President Truman, it was said, is collaborating with Mr. Dean Acheson on a book. The title of the book? Oh yes, *How to Preserve Capitalism in One Country*. An exaggeration, certainly, but then humour depends on some element of exaggeration.

That the Muscovites should feel hopeful and confident is hardly surprising. They can see signs of abundance in the shops; spot the steel-frames of innumerable new blocks of flats scattered all over Moscow; hear from eye-witnesses accounts of how the course of rivers is being altered to bring water to the parched earth in Soviet Asia; judge for themselves the implications of the Sino-Soviet pact of friendship and mutual assistance for peaceful construction which unites nearly a third of

the human race on the basis of equality and solidarity of progressive purpose. With all this and more to encourage hope for the future, how can they think of it as a nightmare of M. Sartre's imagination or as Mr. Eliot's dream of an everlasting death?

But the point is that even a moderately cautious and by no means over-sanguine journalist like myself, after a few weeks in Moscow begins to feel optimistic about human destiny. And for two reasons. First, the war psychosis which obsesses the Western mind is singularly absent here. Not that the Soviet citizens do not realise the danger of a new world war. Yet nobody talks of war as though it were a fatality inherent in the nature of things; nobody is looking for deep shelters or funk-holes wherein to escape the atom bomb; nobody is arranging private or public affairs on the assumption that a global catastrophe is around the corner and therefore nothing matters. On the contrary, all seem to be planning in the belief that peace is not only a desirable objective, but a realisable one; that forces for peace, if they could be mobilised, are much stronger and getting stronger every day than the forces driving towards war.

Whether this is over-confidence or not, events alone can show, but it is all the same a refreshing contrast to the pessimistic mood of the West. Indeed, the Soviet capital could serve as an excellent sanitorium for Western statesmen suffering from war nerves, provided, of course, they could be persuaded to submit themselves to the excellent Socialist therapy of honest and productive work.

The second reason is even more important. For a writer coming from a country which for the past two centuries has suffered from imperialist oppression and spoliation, and which even today has not been able to break free from all the bonds of servitude, being in Moscow is a uniquely inspiring experience in a special sense. For here one can appreciate the creative labour of men without any reservations at the back of one's mind.

What the Soviet people have and what they are building, the good things of life they possess and will

possess in increasing measure in the coming months and years, were doubly significant to me because I knew that the prosperity of the Soviets is not built on the poverty of any other people. It is not stolen from anybody and it is not borrowed from anybody. The people have created it and are expanding it with their own honest toil.

Happiness is, or ought to be, the birth-right of every child. But the happiness of Soviet children seemed to me more poignant, more precious, because their laughter does not screen the rickety legs, the hungry bellies and the stifled cries of children elsewhere.

During the years since the end of World War II, I have been in many countries in the East and the West. I was in London when the flags went up on VE and VJ days and again when gloom reigned at the Tory Central Office on the day of Labour's victory at the polls in 1945. I was in India both before and after the 'transfer of power'. I have seen France in the days when the hopes engendered by the resistance were still illuminating the faces and hearts of Frenchmen and I have seen her since the advent of the Marshall Age, with the collaborators and *cagoulards* back in places of influence and power. I have tasted the languorous beauty of Summer in Berlin in 1947 where every natural prospect seemed pleasant and only the man-made world seemed vile. I have witnessed something of the process of resurrection in Warsaw; something, too, of the gaiety of Prague resonant with the music and laughter of the democratic youth of the world. But being in Moscow in 1950 has been an experience of unique richness.

Why? Because Moscow is more than the capital of a great country; it is the heart of a new world, the centre of a new civilisation, the symbol of a new fraternity. Talking to one's Russian friends one gradually begins to realise what the real secret is of Soviet strength and confidence. It is not only the Soviet heavy industry, collec-

tivised agriculture, or even the might of the Red Army, Navy and Air Force. These are important attributes of strength, but they are only part of it. The inner core of this strength and confidence is a certitude based on a new universalism of outlook and sympathy which sees in the peoples of the whole world, not enemies, but allies. True, it is not an abstract universalism which pays lip service to airy doctrines of all-pervasive love while practising its reverse. The Soviets do not subscribe to the apocalyptic idealism which would urge the lamb to lie down trustingly beside the lion. They would prefer the lambs to organise themselves, to defend themselves against the beasts of prey. They believe in dealing with the social beasts of prey appropriately and ruthlessly. But they also believe that the beasts of prey are very few and isolated while the peace-loving lambs are the majority of mankind.

That is why when speaking of the West the Soviets never make the mistake of confusing the ruling classes with the people. I noted, for example, that in the two plays on American themes which I saw in Moscow — *The Snowflake* at the Children's Theatre and *The Voice of America* at the Red Army Theatre — though the reactionaries, warmongers and racialists were justly pilloried and condemned, an attempt was also made to show the saner and more humane elements in American society. In fact, it was these latter which were shown to triumph in the end. Naive optimism, perhaps, but it revealed something of the Soviet attitude to mankind.

Just before I left Moscow I happened to attend a party given by a minor diplomat for some other diplomat. It was in its own way quite an entertaining affair, though after half an hour one felt like opening the windows and letting in some fresh air into the room. One learnt many things from the omniscient 'men on the spot'. One of them even told me, with the cocksureness worthy of Commander Campbell of B.B.C. Brains' Trust fame, that the explanation for the strange passion of Moscow citizens for ice-cream is that in Moscow cold "ice-cream is several degrees warmer" than the air.

(The information, alas, came too late for me to experiment by taking a couple of ice-cream bricks into bed with me instead of the hot-water bottle!)

At this party there was one question which was persistently put to me. How did I find the Russians? Did I not find that they were difficult to get on with? I am afraid my answer must have deeply disappointed my questioners. For it is a fact that, far from finding it difficult to get along with the Russians, I found them extremely easy to deal with, certainly much easier than the Anglo-Saxons and indeed than Europeans generally. And for the excellent reason that whether one agreed with them or not, they seemed to talk about human problems seriously and in terms which are relevant to the contemporary human situation.

A Western intellectual, for instance, notwithstanding all his pretentious metaphysics and harping on the theme of moral values and humanism, sees himself as the centre of the universe and can rarely establish any identity of interest with anybody beyond the frontiers of Europe and the United States—if indeed as far. The Soviet intellectual, on the other hand, is not inhibited in his sympathies by any such tribal considerations. He can feel at home with a Chinese worker, a negro stevedore, an Indian peasant and all the rest of toiling humanity without the slightest tinge of self-consciousness, patronage or hesitancy. He can do so because he really does understand the anguish as well as the aspirations of the common people of the world as though they were his own.

There is a great deal of talk these days about 'the iron curtain'. But the 'iron curtains' do not necessarily begin at the frontier posts. They begin much nearer home; they begin in the hearts of men. And today it is not the Russians but the Westerners who have withdrawn themselves behind an iron curtain of indifference to the fate of the vast majority of mankind who are not privileged to belong to a fictitious 'Atlantic Community'.

A journalist's life is made up of arrivals and departures. All arrivals are iridescent with expectancy; all

departures are tinged with sadness. In bidding farewell to Moscow, however, the sadness is even keener. But beyond this sadness, there is also a feeling of gratification and of fulfilment — gratification at having witnessed the future in the making and fulfilment for having verified that the future is something wholesome, even noble.

## POSTSCRIPT: IN REPLY TO A LETTER

PRIVATE letters should, as a rule, be privately answered. But one is entitled to make an exception to this rule when a private letter raises issues of public interest and importance. In such a case a public answer is justified. This explanation is called forth by the fact that I have recently received a letter which falls into this category.

A reader of mine, a lady from Calcutta, has been highly incensed by what she charitably describes as my "mischievous articles" on the Soviet Union which have been appearing in the various Indian papers. She writes to voice her indignant protest on behalf of the "common man of India". I do not claim to know what the "common man of India" thinks on this matter, though I am disinclined to believe that my critical correspondent accurately interprets the views and feelings of the common people of India regarding the Soviet Union. On the other hand, I am willing to admit that she reflects the attitude of a considerable section of the Indian middle class, that her views are held passionately, and require serious attention even if they are not always lucidly expressed. I propose, therefore, to answer the points she raises.

It is not an easy assignment. Passionate convictions are not always a guarantee of logical coherence; the arguments of my critic tend often to take the form of accusatory assertions—I might even say presumptions—without any attempt to substantiate them. She accuses me of holding "a brief for the Moscow type of democracy." "We in India," she vehemently assures me, "hate such democracy." I plead guilty to the charge: I do believe that Soviet democracy represents a far-reaching advance on bourgeois democracy, just as bourgeois

democracy represented a great advance on feudalism. For the fundamental principle of Soviet democracy, as set forth categorically in the Soviet constitution, is that "all power belongs to the working people of town and country."

I am not prepared to believe that the vast majority of the Indian people are opposed to this radical conception of democracy. After all, the Indian National Congress, during the period when it was struggling against British Imperialism, promised us precisely such a form of government. If my correspondent would care to read the Congress Resolution of August 1942, she will find in it a pregnant phrase which might well have come straight from the Stalin Constitution. For it promises that in a free India all power will be ultimately vested "in the workers in the fields and factories". The Congress has not so far redeemed that pledge and, as things are, shows no promise of doing so. The Soviets have. Surely, for this achievement they deserve our admiration, rather than our hatred.

Of course, she does not believe that all power in the Soviet Union belongs to the workers and peasants. On the contrary, she holds that in Moscow "only State Imperialism is prevailing and there is no scope for civil liberties." I am not sure what she means by "State Imperialism" since I do not know of any 'private' imperialism. But I do know what imperialism signifies. It signifies something more than a state of mind. It signifies a specific economic system which emerges at a certain stage of capitalist development, namely, the monopolist stage. It demands as the condition of its operative existence foreign markets, sources of raw material and cheap labour, and, inevitably, strongly entrenched, monopolist groups.

The Soviet Union came into being through a process of revolution which involved the destruction of the capitalists and landlords. Today you can travel from Libau to Vladivostok, from Tbilisi to the Bering Strait and you will look in vain for a capitalist — anybody who derives his livelihood by exploiting the labour of others.

That is precisely why the capitalists of the world hate the Soviet Union; that is why they would not hesitate even to provoke a world war, if they could, to destroy the Soviets. For it is not any concern for democracy that inspires their consistent and bitter hatred of the U.S.S.R. If they were really concerned about democracy there would be plenty for them to do much nearer home — enough, at any rate, to absorb their crusading energies for generations to come in setting their own house in order. But it is obvious that the reason why the Soviet Union is a thorn in the flesh of the capitalist states is precisely because of the challenge of its democratic principles.

As for civil liberties, I do not know whose liberties my critic has in mind. If she means the liberties of the common people then I can assure her that nowhere else are people so proud and conscious of their rights and prerogatives as in the U.S.S.R. And for the good reason that the Soviet Revolution brought to the oppressed men and women of not only Russia, but the colonial empire of the Czars, the healing breath of freedom.

Ask a Tadjik, or a Georgian, or an Uzbek, or a Khirgiz what the Revolution has meant to him. For he should know, not only in the abstract, but in his living flesh how his people have been elevated from the status of slavery and serfdom to a world of freedom in which nobody is subject to any social handicaps because of the accident of birth or creed or colour or race. But it is true that the Soviet State does deny certain kinds of freedom. For instance, nobody in the Soviet Union has the right to live by exploiting the labour of other people, or to advocate the return of a system which permits such inequity. The Soviets deny people the right to propagate racial and national hatreds. But are these the liberties which interest the common people?

The Soviet people are realistic. They believe that in this best of all possible worlds the freedom of the exploited can only be established by strictly curtailing the freedom of the exploiters, that the liberty of the colonial and subject peoples can be won only by denying liberty

to the imperialists. They cherish no apocalyptic illusions, as I have already said elsewhere, that the lamb can lie down peacefully beside the lion. It can do so, but only at the risk, indeed certainty, of ending sooner or later in the belly of the lion. It is for this reason that the Soviets have refused to take chances and have been ruthless in dealing with the human beasts of prey. But this is praiseworthy ruthlessness: it is inspired by a sense of compassion and charity towards humanity.

Like the octave of the musical scale, the anti-Soviet propagandists have a very restricted and stereotyped gamut on which to modulate their 'chantage', though their capacity for improvising variations on a restricted number of themes is quite impressive. I am not surprised that the lady from Calcutta, who has obviously taken in so much of puerile and perverse propaganda, immediately passes on from the issue of civil liberties to that of alleged "forced labour camps in Russia." Have you seen, she challenges me, the forced labour camps in the U.S.S.R.? If I wished to score a debating point I could ask her in return: Have you? For I do not believe that she has been anywhere within a thousand miles of the Soviet frontiers. But it is not my purpose to score debating points. The issue is far too serious for that. So I will say straightway that I have not seen forced labour camps in the Soviet Union. I did not go to the Soviet Union to study her penal system.

How many of the journalists who go to America, for example, visit the Sing Sing prison; or study the technique of third degree investigation; or ask to see the agony of men in the electric chair; or make a point to observe the working of Jim Crow laws and the edifying institution of lynching? Yet any correspondent going to Moscow is expected to make his first call in the Soviet capital at the Lubianka prison. This morbid curiosity reveals the depth of middle class prejudice against the Soviet Union.

There is no denying that the Soviet Union has prisons and correctional institutions. Had I more time at my disposal I would certainly have liked to study the

Soviet approach to crime and punishment. I have no doubt that a people who believe in a rational and scientific approach to social problems, would also deal with the problem of crime in a humane and rational manner. Meanwhile, I am not prepared to accept the evidence of Anglo-American propaganda on the question of forced labour in the U.S.S.R. I believe this evidence to be wholly unconvincing. After all, the British journalists were not conspicuously truthful in reporting on the movement of Indian Liberation during the inter-war years: a British-owned paper, which is still allowed to function in India, during the Bihar earthquake days went even so far as to imply that the Congress and Pandit Nehru himself had misappropriated money given for the Relief Fund. I would, therefore, advise my correspondent and others like her, who tend to be a little too credulous, to treat the Western reports on Russia with an element of prudent reserve.

From her denunciation of the Soviet Union, the writer of the letter passes on to a very far-reaching generalisation. "Marxism", she affirms dogmatically, "is an ideology hated by all the common people." (I quote her verbatim). And what are her grounds for this statement? "India", she says, "believes in material prosperity as well as spiritual attainment... In the land of Ramakrishna, Ram Mohan, Bankim, Vivekananda, Gandhiji and Rabindranath, Materialism is hated. Man cannot live by bread alone." For a person who believes in "spiritual attainment", this is an unusually violent, even heartless statement. For though it is true that man cannot live by bread alone, there are millions of people in India who would be glad at least to have some bread. The million and a half men and women and children who are officially admitted to have died in the Bengal Famine, for example, would have preferred the smallest crust of bread to the largest platitude about spiritual attainment.

No Marxist in Russia, or outside Russia, is stupid enough to believe that bread alone makes life worth living. But no Marxist is so stupid as the well-fed,

who have never known the pangs of hunger, and yet can claim that a great spiritual and cultural life can be built on a vast edifice of human misery and poverty such as that which exists in India. That is the reason why the Marxists insist that the precondition for a spiritual and cultural renaissance of India, as in fact of most other countries in Asia, is the liquidation of the root causes of poverty.

The Marxists believe, moreover, that this can be done only on the basis of scientific socialism and not through some magical or obscurantist solution. In this belief they are in good company: even the present Prime Minister of India, at least in public, still avows his faith in the fundamental theories of Marxism. And as for the common people of India, history alone will show whether or not they "hate Marxism". The balance of probability is that they will come to accept it. In doing so they will not be repudiating their great cultural heritage. Nobody would want them to, least of all the Soviet Union which believes in the right of every people to have its own culture, its own traditions, its own way of life.

Indeed, the criticism of the present Indian leadership that one hears in Russia is not that it is excessively national in its outlook, but that it is not nationalistic enough, that it tends too much to follow in the wake of British Imperialists, and is not sufficiently vigilant in guarding India's national interests and sovereignty.

The Soviet people have at least as much regard for the cultural heritage of India as my correspondent. I even found a translation of the *Ramayana* in a Georgian bookshop in Tbilisi. During the past few years the Soviets have printed some quarter of a million copies of translations of Tagore's books in Russian alone. I have no figures as to how many copies have been printed in the same period in India, but I have reasons to suspect that they would not add up to the Russian figure. An Indian publishing firm in London with which I happen to have some associations printed three thousand copies of *Farewell, My Friends*. The bulk of these remain, after

three years, still unsold — an eloquent comment on the Western interest in Indian culture. It would be better if, instead of indiscriminately invoking great names, we paid them the compliment of reading their written word.

There is always an atavistic tendency to seek a scapegoat for one's frustrations, and we in India are passing through such an irrational phase. The lady from Calcutta easily succumbs to this tendency. She blames the Soviets for all that has gone wrong with India during the past few years; and, of course, she blames the Communists whom she calls all sorts of names. Not being a member of the Communist Party I will not presume to answer for its policies. However, since anti-Communism is so fashionable just now in certain circles in India, let me say without equivocation that most of the Communists I have known have been men of incorruptible integrity, patriotic to the core, inspired by a passion for social justice, and possessed of rare intelligence. If their critics possessed half their integrity, honesty of purpose, altruism and intelligence the world would be a better place to live in.

But one's attitude to the Communists is not the point at issue. The point at issue is the responsibility or otherwise of the Soviet Union and the Indian Communists for the present morass of frustration in which India finds herself. On this point there seems no logical reason to attribute the responsibility for the partition of India and all the ghastly tragedies that have flowed from that monumental act of folly to the Soviets or the Indian Communists. I come from a province which has suffered beyond measure because of partition. But it is important to keep a sense of proportion and history. And the historical fact is that it was not the Soviet Union which drew up the Mountbatten Plan for the division of India and which the Indian leaders so lightheartedly accepted, without realising that it was like signing the death warrant of thousands of innocent people.

The Soviet publicists and the Indian Communists exposed that plan as an imperialist manoeuvre, damaging to the interests of Hindus and Muslims alike. They

warned that it would lead to tragic consequences. Had their warning been heeded, India might have been spared one of the most unjust and undemocratic partitions in human history, and thousands of people—Hindus and Muslims alike—who died in the Punjab and Bengal and elsewhere might still have been living. But the warning was not heeded. It was even resented. The results are there for all to see.

My correspondent concludes on a somewhat threatening note. "If you are an Indian," she admonishes me, "stop writing such arrant nonsense." I regret I cannot oblige her even if that sounds somewhat unchivalrous. Quite apart from the fact that as a journalist it is my function to report on things and events as I see them, I am convinced that friendly relations between the Soviet Union and India are an essential condition for peace in Asia.

To achieve that friendship it is necessary, above all, to fight the anti-Soviet virus which is being so systematically and sedulously introduced into our thinking through the powerfully orchestrated Anglo-American propaganda. That propaganda is the biggest swindle perpetrated on mankind; and it must be exposed. That is why, I am afraid, I shall continue to write my "arrant nonsense" trusting that as history moves, one day it might make sense even to Mrs. K. of Calcutta.

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